



THE
PANSY
BOOKS

BY

"PANSY"



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MARJORIE'S MOONLIGHT WALK

"She heard the unmistakable approach of horses' feet in the distance."
(See page 49.)

MAKING FATE

BY

PANSY, *pseud.*

(MRS. G. R. ALDEN)

AUTHOR OF "ESTER RIED," "HER ASSOCIATE MEMBERS,"
"ONLY TEN CENTS," "WANTED," ETC.

[Alden, Isabella (Macdonald),

ILLUSTRATED

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MAKING FATE.

CHAPTER I.

WAITING.

MRS. EDMONDS had tried every chair in the room, from the straight-backed uncompromising one nearest to the dining-room to the wide-armed "Sleepy Hollow" in the alcove, but none of them fitted her restless mood. Twice she had resolutely settled herself on the wide, old-fashioned, pillowy lounge, arranged the pillows at head and back with infinite pains, drawn the bright-colored afghan over her and resolved to rest; only to spring up again in five minutes and renew her walk up and down the room, broken only by a pause to peer out first at the western and then at the southern window. It was a pleasant enough prospect outside. The rain had been falling in torrents, and the little river which it had made still gurgled down the gutters, glistening in the brilliant moonlight. The street was quite still. During the hours which Mrs. Edmonds had waited there had been the sound of many feet; and the sound had

been listened to by this woman as though her hope of life depended on her finding the footstep she waited for. Occasionally there had been one so like what she sought, that she held her breath for it to draw near, and pass; all the while her swift-beating heart telling her that if it had been *the* footstep she would have known it, oh, as far away as the sound could reach her!

Yet still she waited for each new one in the same breathless, hopeful way. As the hours waned, the passers by grew less and less frequent, until now the most belated traveler seemed to have reached home; and she was still waiting!

She turned from the window once more, and the odor of coffee reached her; it seemed to be hateful to her; she went swiftly and closed the door which led from the dining-room into the little kitchen, leaving the tiny coffee-pot to its fate.

They were pretty rooms, sitting and dining-room, with folding doors between. The doors were rolled back out of sight, and the portières so looped as to give a view of a dining-table daintily laid for two people, who must both have had very refined tastes. The napery was fine and fresh, the china delicate and the silver sterling. The Edmonds family had lived nearly always in a larger house than this; their table had been drawn out, often full length, and was wont to be surrounded by merry, happy people.

Time and change had left only two, and the table had to be closed to its smallest; but there

seemed no reason why the family heirlooms in silver and china should be laid away; so the table was pretty, as of old. Mrs. Edmonds surveyed its prettiness almost with a groan. She had allowed herself to become so nervous over possibilities, that all her dainty preparations for a late supper looked like so many mockeries. Still, she went once more and sat down in the "Sleepy Hollow," drawing a wrap about her and resolving to be reasonable. "What *could* have happened?" she asked herself for the hundredth time; "not an accident, surely; because there were so many of them, that we should have heard of it before this time. As for their not starting for home to-night, that is nonsense. Don't I know that I would never be left here alone? More than that, she promised."

Her mental argument was interrupted by the sound of footsteps overhead, and her thoughts were turned into a new channel. Mr. Maxwell was at home then; she had not heard a sound from his room before. He must have let himself in when she went to the coal closet for that lump of coal. It was strange he was up so late, or rather so early,—for the little clock on the dining-room mantel at that moiment murmured in soft, silvery tones: "One, two!" They struck terror to the watcher's heart. It was actually two o'clock, and Marjorie for the first time in all her nineteen years was away from her!

The mother started abruptly, and giving herself

no more time for thought, made her way with all speed up the long flight of stairs, and knocked at her lodger's door. What if he was a comparative stranger, having been settled in her best front room less than a month? He was a man, and would know what should be done in an emergency; and she really *could not* endure this suspense longer. Visions of what Marjorie might say concerning this appeal to the lodger in her behalf crossed the troubled mother's brain as she sped, but she resolutely put them aside, and knocked at the closed door. It was opened on the instant, and Mr. Maxwell, fully dressed and looking as though he had not thought of sleep that night, stood before her.

"I beg your pardon," she said, speaking hurriedly, "but I am so worried about my daughter that I don't know what to do. I heard your step just now, and determined to come and advise with you.

The door was opened wider, and Mr. Maxwell reached forth and took the little night lamp from a hand which trembled, at the same time he motioned toward an easy-chair.

"Come in, Mrs. Edmonds, and have a seat while you tell me how I can serve you. Your daughter is not ill, I hope?"

"Oh no,—why, I don't know what she is! I have thought that perhaps she had been taken suddenly ill; but there were eight of them; they cannot all be ill, and surely they would have come for

her mother." All of which did not enlighten Mr. Maxwell.

"She is not at home, then?" he ventured.

Thus helped, Mrs. Edmonds gathered her wits and explained.

A party of eight including her daughter had started that morning on a nutting expedition. At the Schuyler farm, seven miles out, they were to be joined by the young people there, and go on to the extreme southern part of the Schuyler woods, some five or six miles farther. The plan had been to return to the Schuylers for an early tea, after which the guests were to drive home by moonlight. But they were to have been at home by ten at the latest; indeed Marjorie had exclaimed over that hour and said that she must be at home by nine. "And now," Mrs. Edmonds finished hurriedly, her face paling over the thought, "it is after two o'clock, and I know something has happened to them. What can I do?"

Mr. Maxwell essayed to comfort her.

"You have forgotten the storm," he said cheerily. "It doubtless came up just at the time they were to start; and it rained very hard, you remember; moreover, the storm lasted a remarkably long time."

No, she had forgotten nothing; she knew just when the first flash of lightning came, and just how long the rain continued; and just how brilliant the moonlight had been since the storm was over. Ample time for them to have reached home two

hours ago, even though they had not started until the sky was entirely clear again, "You forget," she said pitifully, "that it will soon be three o'clock in the morning. Do you know the road to the Schuyler farm, Mr. Maxwell? There is a bridge to cross, about five miles out, over a very ugly stream of water; the embankments there are very high, and the sides of the bridge are not protected; more than that, I think I have heard somebody say that the bridge is unsafe. It is possible that they may have driven over the side,—or the bridge may have fallen and they may all be in peril together."

He made haste to reassure her. Oh, no, indeed; he knew the bridge well; was over it indeed not twelve hours ago; it was perfectly safe; and no driver in his senses would be in danger of driving off the embankment. Had the party not a reliable driver?

Mrs. Edmonds admitted that Mr. Ralph Bramlett was the driver; that he drove his father's horses and was perfectly accustomed to them; but then they were spirited animals and were doubtless afraid of lightning; many horses were; and if nothing had happened to them, why had they not reached home long ago?

Then Mr. Maxwell had another idea. Was not the Schuyler farm the hospitable mansion where so many young people were entertained? He had heard that it was the custom for large parties from town to spend several days there. Un-

doubtedly this nutting party detained by the storm had accepted the invitation of the Schuylers to spend the night, and take an early morning ride. It would have been a perfectly reasonable thing to do, because they probably feared another storm, and besides, they would naturally dislike to disturb several families by coming home at a late hour. In fact the more he thought about it, the more certain he was that there was no occasion for anxiety; her daughter was undoubtedly sleeping quietly.

Then Mrs. Edmonds rose up and reached for her lamp, and her voice had a dignified tinge :

“ I beg your pardon, Mr. Maxwell, I ought not to have disturbed you ; of course you cannot be expected to understand. I am sure you mean to comfort me, but my daughter would not for one moment have consented to spending the night away from home, and leaving me in suspense and anxiety concerning her. Even if she had not promised, she would not have done such a thing ; but her last words to me were that she should be at home before ten. I knew the storm must detain them, however, and rested quietly until near midnight ; but the sky has been entirely clear since a little before ten. There is no conceivable reason except by accident which could have kept my daughter from me ; but of course you do not understand.”

He intercepted her hand and took charge of the little lamp again.

“ Let me carry it down for you,” he said cheerily. I still think you have no cause for anxiety ; the company was too large not to be able to be heard from in some way before this time, in case of accident. Still, I really *can* understand something of a mother’s feelings. I have a dear mother of my own. I’ll tell you what we will do, Mrs. Edmonds. If you will lie down and rest, I’ll mount my horse and take a trip toward the Schuyler farm and learn the facts. I was making ready for a very early start in another direction, and Selim will be saddled and bridled waiting for me ; but I can easily make the trip later, or wait until another day for that matter.”

Up to that moment Mrs. Edmonds had not shed a tear, but at the sound of the sympathetic voice, planning a scheme that would at least relieve her of this terrible suspense, she lost for the moment her carefully trained self-control and broke into a fit of weeping. Mr. Maxwell made no attempt to restrain the tears ; he gently seated the trembling lady in the chair from which she had risen, then went briskly about his room, making final preparations for departure, talking cheerily the while.

“ It will be a very short ride out to the farm, Mrs. Edmonds, for Selim and me ; and by the time you have had one nap we shall be back here with good news from the truants. Young people cannot always be depended upon for excellent judgment ; and your daughter, remember, may

have had difficulty in making so large a party see with her eyes."

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Edmonds, rising again, and resolutely pushing back the tears, "I must seem very weak to you; but indeed I am not in the habit of being without my daughter. I ought not to allow you to put aside your plans for the sake of relieving my anxiety; my daughter would be shocked at such a thought. I presume it may be as you think; and yet——"

She did not finish her sentence aloud. In her heart she said that Marjorie would have no difficulty in controlling the movement of Ralph Bramlett; that he was only too willing to do as she wished, and that he controlled the horses. But of course this could not be said aloud. Mr. Maxwell finished the sentence for her.

"And yet, certainty is better than surmise," he said, brightly, "I know it; we will very soon relieve your mind. Do not be troubled about disarranging my plans; Mrs. Edmonds; I assure you it is of no consequence; I have no business which cannot as well be done another day if that were necessary. Now I am ready; and you will, I am sure, remember your part of the contract and try to rest. May I help to rest you by a reminder that your daughter is in the care of One who cannot be overcome by accidents of any sort?"

"Oh, I know it," she, said gratefully. "You will think me very foolish, but there have been times to-night when I believe I should have lost

my reason if I could not have stayed my fears with that. I am so unused to being without my child; we have been all in all to each other for thirteen years. And yet, what is my trust worth? There came a time when, as you see, I could wait no longer?"

"Yes," he said, smiling, "that is the way we trust Him. Yet He bears with us. I read with great satisfaction, only yesterday, the story of Gideon. Do you remember how many times the Lord strengthened his wavering faith by a sign? We all like props of this kind. I think I can bring you word in an hour at the latest, Mrs. Edmonds."

She stood in the hall noting the sound of his retreating footsteps; she listened to their brisk ring until they were lost in the distance. She was alone again; but her throat felt less dry, the tears had relieved it; her heart did not seem to beat in such oppressive thuds. Yes, undoubtedly she liked human props. How kind he had been, and how quick! The swiftness of his movements had had a soothing effect upon her; at least this sickening suspense with its opportunity to conjecture all sorts of horrible possibilities would soon be over. He would bring her word. And he was good, too. How strong that reminder was, about the One who had her daughter in charge! Oh the mother trusted *Him*. What would her years of widowhood have been without His mighty Arm to lean upon! If only He were her daughter's trust,

well. And if—— No, she would not finish that as thought; loyalty to her daughter should make her put it away. What was Mr. Maxwell but a stranger, come for a few weeks to pay a good price for their vacant room. And Ralph Bramlett had grown up with Marjorie, and been always her friend. Why should she for a moment allow herself to wish that he were like Mr. Maxwell?

She sat down in her reading chair, and drew the shaded lamp towards her. She had not promised to try to sleep; she knew better than to try. She did not remember the story of Gideon very well; she wanted to read it. She had some difficulty in finding the story, and in picking it out from various chapters. She stopped many times during its reading, to listen to imaginary sounds on the street. She decided that if she could have had Gideon's signs, she surely could have trusted.

Meantime, Mr. Maxwell and Selim were on their way to the Schuyler farm.

CHAPTER II.

A VICTIM.

IT was a very merry company which gathered in the Schuyler farm-house, detained, as they fondly believed, by the unusually severe and long continued thunder-storm.

It had been a genuine detention at first; while the lightning flashed continually and the earth seemed fairly to tremble under the roar of thunder, they had been grave enough; more than one of the group silently wishing herself safely at home. The bountiful supper which had been spread in the hospitable dining-room was neglected while the storm raged.

“Oh dear!” one of the guests had said, “we cannot eat while it is thundering so!” and though Bob Schuyler remarked philosophically that “thunder didn’t hurt anybody,” and was ready for his supper, it was, by common consent, remanded to the kitchen to be kept hot, and cold, while the nutting party grouped themselves in the centre of the large parlor as far away from windows as possible, and talked in somewhat subdued tones, and waited.

As for Marjorie Edmonds she did not talk at all

She could not help remembering that her mother was inclined to be nervous during a thunder-storm. One of her earliest recollections was of hearing her father say: "We must go downstairs little girl, and help mamma be cheerful while this storm lasts." Of late years she had taken up that father's work, or tried to, and was generally at hand to "help mamma be cheerful" during a storm. Now she was perhaps quite alone; and when an unusually brilliant flash of lightning flooded the room, followed instantly by the deafening peal of thunder, Marjorie wished earnestly that she had not left her.

But when the thunder ceased, and the rain, which had been falling in torrents, came only in gentle drops, the spirits of the company began to rise. They were ready now for pleasantries and merry little thrusts at the expense of the more nervous. By the time the belated supper was again ready the rain had ceased altogether, and the guests were hilarious. That is, most of them were. It was impossible for Marjorie Edmonds, being the girl she was, to forget that they were still seven miles from home, and the hour was nearing in which she had told her mother they would be sure to return. But then, of course, mother would take the storm into consideration, and not expect them so early. It was surprising how long they lingered at that supper table! The clock struck ten while they were still eating nuts and guessing conundrums. And they lingered still, in spite of the

fact that it would now be nearly midnight before they could hope to reach home! Marjorie, who had a vivid imagination and was well acquainted with her mother, could hardly restrain her impatience. She had finished her meal long before and sat back waiting. Had she been seated near enough to Ralph Bramlett to have given him a word in undertone, she felt that matters might be hastened, for Ralph Bramlett was a power among the young people. But fate had placed her the length of the table from him, and on the same side as himself, so that she could not even send him a meaning glance. There was nothing for it but to wait until those thoughtless creatures had finished their nuts and their stories. There were the Douglass girls hindering as much as any, although their father was an invalid and would be sure to get no sleep until they were safe at home.

It was while they still surrounded the table that Mrs. Schuyler, hospitably inclined, said: "I think it would be a good plan for you to remain all night. It is getting late, and we may have another shower. I don't suppose the weather is settled. We have plenty of room and shall be delighted to have you stay."

A chorus of voices greeted this sentence. The Schuyler girls in eager seconding of their mother's invitation; some of the guests in earnest protest, others of them declaring that that would be great fun; and one or two explaining that they must be at home very early in the morning.

“Well,” said Mrs. Schuyler, “that might be managed. If you really cannot stay to breakfast, you might plan for a very early morning ride. It is light enough for driving soon after four o’clock, and a much pleasanter hour for it than late at night in a storm.”

There was much eager talking, and Marjorie who had not at first given much heed, not deeming it possible that so absurd a plan could carry weight, began to be seriously alarmed. Oh, for a word with Ralph! What if he should commit himself to some of those silly girls who actually wanted to stay, and keep their families in anxiety? Ralph was very tenacious of his word; if he promised them he would not go, it might require more persuasion than she was willing to make to carry her point. Yet her point must be carried, at all hazards.

Just that which she feared, was happening at that moment. “Oh, *you* won’t stay?” Estelle Douglass was saying to Ralph, “I think it would be a real lark to do so, but I have not the slightest expectation of it. Marjorie Edmonds will look at you with those great brown eyes of hers and murmur something about being in haste to start, and you will go out and harness the horses, though one of them should be struck with lightning while you are doing it, and though a cyclone should carry away the wagon. *Somehow* you will manage to get her home; and make the rest of us go in your train, of course.”

Now Ralph Bramlett, being a weak young man, easily swayed by impulse, was of course painfully susceptible to such talk as this.

“ Really ! ” he said, his face flushing under her merry gaze, “ I do not know why you should suppose me to be a person so utterly devoid of common sense. Of course I will stay if the majority of my party wish to do so ; though I had not supposed that you would, on account of making the people at home anxious.”

His tormentor laughed merrily. “ That is too funny ! ” she said gayly. “ Don’t you know we are all aware that you respond to Marjorie’s slightest nod ? You have even caught her phraseology. The rest of us give our parents credit for some common sense, but Marjorie knows that her mother proceeds to worrying about her as soon as she is out of sight, and has to be humored accordingly. I don’t blame you, Ralph ; Marjorie is a prize worth winning, and she isn’t to be won by people who do not know enough to bow when she does, and shake their heads in accordance with her negatives. But she is a dear girl, and worthy of all manner of concessions.”

After that it was unfortunate that Marjorie’s first words when she met him at last in the parlor, were :

“ Oh, Ralph, won’t you see about the horses at once ? It is growing so late, and I cannot think what mother will do, if we are not there soon.”

“ Your mother will be reasonable, of course ; ”

he answered coldly ; more coldly than he was in the habit of speaking to Marjorie, I do not know that we shall go at all. I must consider the wishes of the entire party, Marjorie ; and if the majority wish to stay——”

She interrupted him, her eyes wide with anxiety ; “ Oh but Ralph, you promised. Don't you know when I appealed to you this morning, you said : ‘ Why, of course, Mrs. Edmonds, we shall be back before ten. We cannot see to pick nuts as late as that.’ ”

“ I beg your pardon,” he said. “ That was in no sense a promise ; it was a mere statement of the probable. That we were to have a thunder-storm of unprecedented severity to hinder us I certainly did not take into those calculations.”

“ I know, you could not help our being so late ; but, Ralph, it does not rain now ; see how bright the moonlight is ! If we start at once we may be at home by midnight. Oh, Ralph, won't you hurry ?

If Estelle's merry eyes had not been on him he would not have answered so coldly as he did.

“ I do not see, Marjorie, why you cannot be reasonable, like the rest of the party ; they all have mothers, as well as you ; I think the majority of them wish to stay all night. It is so late now that we cannot any us get home without disturbing the entire household ; while the most of us at least are to be trusted to take care not only of ourselves, but of those entrusted to us. At any rate I am bound to think of the entire party and not single out one

to control it. If the most of them wish to stay that must settle it."

Marjorie dropped the hand which she had rested lightly on his arm; she was hurt to the heart. No, she did not want to be selfish; she had not supposed that she was so; she believed that he of all persons would be the last one to think so. What had happened to make him so cruelly indifferent to her wishes? Yet she must get home. Despite her pride and her hurt feelings she must make one more effort.

"Ralph, even at the risk of your good opinion I must make another effort; it is so important that I get home. You do not understand how a mother feels who is all alone in the world; a mother who was left to my care. We have never been away from each other over night since my father died. If the others want to stay all night, could not you take me home? I know it is very hard to ask you to take such extra trouble for me, but I feel as though I must go."

Her lip quivered as she spoke, and the young man's heart seemed to leap up into his throat. The thought of a ride with Marjorie at any time was enough to set all his pulses to quivering. She was more to him, ten thousand times, than all the others combined. But those hateful dancing eyes of that girl, Estelle! He could not resist looking over at her at the moment; she was watching them; she comprehended the whole scene. She nodded her mischievous head in the direction

of the stables, and made a slight dexterous motion to indicate himself driving out his horses. There would be no end to her ridicule if he should yield; and Marjorie would have to suffer it with him; no, he must shield her, as well as himself. He steeled himself to look coldly at the quivering lip.

“ I can't do it, Marjorie; think how ridiculously conspicuous it would make us both. From all the talk about me I am sure they have made up their minds to remain. The night would be half over before we could reach home; and we will go as early in the morning as you please; before daylight if you say so. They are afraid of another storm, I suppose; the weather is unsettled, probably. I wonder, Marjorie, since you are so unwilling to trust to my judgment, that you trusted yourself to my care to come.”

This last sentence was added almost in impatience, because he saw that his logic had not moved her a hair's-breadth from her desire. She turned from him, drawing a long breath as she did so, and he remembered afterwards just how her half-suppressed voice sounded as she said slowly, “ I am sorry I did.”

He could have choked himself the next moment for half the words he had spoken. He began to make the most vigorous efforts to induce his party to vote for home. But the spirit of the frolic had by this time gotten hold of them. They were intimate friends at the Schuylers, they had often been entertained there; they knew they were

more than welcome. Nothing was more common than for large parties to come out, by invitation, to spend not only the night, but several days and nights. Oh, their people would understand well enough what had become of them ; they had done it before. Everybody knew they were going to take supper at the Schuylers'. Besides, there was going to be another storm ; they were sure of it : the moonlight looked too bright to last. Two of the girls said that they were awfully afraid of driving during a thunder-storm. Didn't he know it was considered dangerous to be out under the trees ? Besides, horses were almost always afraid of lightning. In short, Ralph Bramlett failed ; and went about gloomily conscious of it. He had given that mischievous spirit, Estelle Douglass, his word that he would abide by the majority, and abide he must. She congratulated him now on his success. " I did not think you could accomplish it," she said. " When I saw her mournful eyes looking up at you, I thought our fun was all over, and began to plan how I should protect myself from the possible rain. You are braver than I thought."

He hated her for saying it. He assured her that it was, in his opinion, a very foolish thing to stay all night ; that there was no more sign of storm outside than there was in the parlor ; that the drive by moonlight would have been charming, and that he was simply a victim of circumstances. In the course of the next hour he contrived to be near enough to Marjorie to speak low.

“I’m awfully sorry, Marjorie; I tried my best to get them to vote to go home. I never saw such idiots.”

She answered him never a word, and moved away from his side of the room as promptly as she could. Merriment ran high in that large old-fashioned parlor, but Ralph Bramlett, who was generally the center of the merriest group, certainly did not have a happy time. He was moody and absent-minded. His eyes followed Marjorie whenever they could do so without being too closely observed. He had all the horror of a weak nature of being observed, where observation would have done no harm. As for Marjorie, it was easy enough, for some time, to keep her in sight. She was very quiet, speaking only when directly appealed to, and she kept her station near one of the wide low windows which commanded a view of the road.

Just why she wished to watch it, she would have found it difficult to explain. A wild idea that somebody might pass who in the brilliant moonlight she should recognize, and to whom she could fly down and beg a passage home, floated through her excited brain, but of course found no judgment to rest upon. It was too late for ordinary passers-by, and she was too far from the road either to recognize or appeal. But she sat and thought it and a dozen other schemes over, not as things which she would attempt, but as plans which might be carried out, suppose the situation were desperate enough. If, for instance, she were a

prisoner here, held by desperadoes, and in danger of her life, how should she plan? She tried to keep her thoughts on some such absurdity, so as not to think too steadily of her mother. That frail nervous, loving mother! What kind of a night of suffering was this to her?

Among the groups around her, merriment grew apace. Nobody was tired or sleepy. Somebody suggested going to bed, and somebody else laughed at the idea. Why should they go tamely to bed at a reasonable hour, as though this were like any other night, instead of a time for them to be together and have a frolic?

By and by, Ralph's watchful eyes noticed that Marjorie Edmonds summoned little Effie Schuyler to her and carried on a whispered conversation with her. Effie was the youngest of the company and had been twice advised by her elder sisters to retire, but had begged for another hour of the fun. Now she carried messages back and forth from Marjorie to her oldest sister; and presently Marjorie slipped away from the room.

She was gone so long that Ralph's anxieties became torture, and he ventured to make inquiries of Miss Schuyler. By which he learned that Marjorie had pleaded headache and weariness and asked to be allowed to slip quietly away to her room without making any break. She had also begged for the little hall-room where there was a single bed, so she would disturb no one by her restlessness. Miss Schuyler had intended to send

Effie there, and give her a more comfortable bed, but she had begged for that. She, Miss Schuyler, had been up once, but everything was so quiet she had not liked to disturb her.

Poor Marjorie, she was really sorry for her, she was unlike those other dear thoughtless girls, she could not help being anxious about her mother.

“If brother Rich had been here,” said Miss Schuyler, “I should have asked him to take Marjorie home.”

CHAPTER III.

AN OPPORTUNITY.

OTHER households than that of Mrs. Edmonds were more or less affected by the non-appearance of the nutting party.

One of these belonged to Mr. Douglass, who was just enough of an invalid to have sleepless nights on very slight provocation. This night was no exception; though, truth to tell, the Douglass girls were careless enough to have taught their father, long before this, the folly of waiting for them. He was not exactly anxious over their delay, but he was wakeful, and listened to every sound which might be wheels, and awoke Mrs. Douglass to say that it had grown colder since the rain, and to ask if Estelle and Fanny had wraps with them. She, good woman, as she answered in the affirmative, forbore to ask the question which she could not keep from her thoughts, namely, what earthly good it would do the girls to inquire about that now? However, being fairly awake, she kept him company, and they talked over matters and things in general, and listened for wheels, until the clock struck twelve. Then Mrs. Douglass said decidedly:

“Now, father, you may as well give the children up and go to sleep. It’s midnight, and they have had more than time to get here since the rain, if they were coming. The whole crowd have decided to stay at Schuyler’s until morning. I know them; they would like nothing better than an excuse to stay all night. They can frolic all the evening, half the night for that matter, and have an early morning ride together in the bargain. They aren’t going to lose so good an excuse as this for lengthening out their good time, I can tell you.”

The nervous father sighed, and said: “When I was young we had to be in the house by ten o’clock; you wouldn’t have caught my father and mother going to bed, if I had been out roving around somewhere until after midnight; and to think of girls doing it doesn’t seem just the thing.”

Mrs. Douglass opened her lips to say that times were changed since he was young; and that the girls were in good company, and it wasn’t likely any harm could come to them; but she was interrupted by a vigorous knocking at the front door.

“There!” said the father, “something has happened; I knew there would.” And he sprang out of bed quickly enough to set his enfeebled heart to throbbing for the remainder of the night.

Nothing very serious had happened. The mother, who was tremblingly struggling into her clothes, being in nowise so free from anxiety as she had tried to represent, felt a great surge of

relief and thanksgiving as she heard the cheery voice of her youngest brother.

“Routed you up, have I, out of a sound, sleep? That’s too bad; but it couldn’t be helped this time. I’ve only a couple of hours to stop; must go on by the express at two-twenty.”

“Only two hours to stop and they had not seen him in more than a year!” The clothes went on rapidly after that; and by the time the youngest daughter, Glyde, having been roused by the sound of voices, had slipped into her pretty red wrapper, and with her hair in rich, yellow-brown waves down her back “appeared on the scene,” they were all in full tide of talk. “Uncle Anthony” was a favorite guest at this house, and the mother thought with a sigh how much her two older daughters were missing.

Evidently the uncle missed some one whom he was anxious to see. He kept an eye on the door as he talked, and seemed to be listening for approaching footsteps. Presently he asked :

“Where is Estelle?—and Fanny?” This latter name added apparently as an afterthought.

He listened to the explanations of their absence with evident disappointment. “I am very sorry,” he said, “more sorry than I can put into words. The fact is, I had a plan; it won’t do any good to tell it now, but I wanted to smuggle Estelle off with me. I am on my way to New York; a hurried business trip; that is, I’m in a desperate hurry to get there, but will have some little time for

sightseeing after one business item of importance is disposed of, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to show Estelle a little of the city. I'm obliged to take the two-twenty train, because it is important that I reach New York before business hours are over to-morrow. You don't think there is any hope that they will get home before that time, I suppose?"

The mother shook her head anxiously and expressed her deep regret; it would have been an outing that Estelle could have remembered all her life; and the child just longed to see New York.

She went to the window and rolled up the shade and peered down the road as though her anxious glance might bring the nutting party into view; while the father explained that the girls were not often out like this and it was not at all according to his ideas; but their mother thought he was over-anxious. Uncle Anthony interrupted him to ask a question of Glyde.

"Why are you not away with the others?"

"Oh, I never am. The girls say that two from a family is enough; that they can't make things into a Douglass party! They say I must wait and take my turn; and my turn never comes."

Her uncle regarded her with an amused smile; and continued to study her as though she were a revelation. Her red wrapper became her well; and the braids of yellow-brown hair which hung down her back seemed to match the dress. She had unusual eyes, too; large, and remarkably

expressive. They seemed to glow with wonder and suppressed delight over the thought of Estelle's opportunity, and to shade with sadness at the same moment over the thought that it was lost. There was a sense in which she was a revelation to her uncle. He was a busy man, whose visits to his sister's home were rare and brief; and he had heretofore lavished all his attentions and most of his gifts on Estelle, the second daughter. None of the family had been surprised over this. They knew instinctively that it grew out of the fact that she bore the same name as Uncle Anthony's wife of a month. The young and beautiful Aunt Estelle whom they had never seen, but of whom they had heard so much. To whom Uncle Anthony had been engaged ever since he was a boy and for whom he waited during the years when there was a frail little mother who would not be happy if her daughter was out of her sight, and to whom the daughter would not give a divided attention. And then the mother had gone to heaven, leaving her daughter to Uncle Anthony's care; for the delayed marriage had been solemnized at last beside the mother's dying bed; and then, Aunt Estelle had followed her mother in one short month. No wonder that the niece, Estelle, was the only one who had seemed to interest Uncle Anthony. He even fancied that she looked like the wife he had buried seven years before. But to-night he looked at Glyde.

"So your turn never comes" he said, and

laughed. And then he told himself that she was growing into a very pretty girl ; that he believed, after all, she looked more like his Estelle than the namesake did ; never realizing, poor man, that he had grown into the habit of seeing resemblances to his lost treasure in every person or thing which struck his fancy.

“ I am so sorry,” said the mother, returning from her fruitless search down the road. “ It will just about break Estelle’s heart. She could go as well as not, too ; her new suit is finished and it would be just the thing to wear. I don’t see for my part why they need have stayed.”

And then Uncle Anthony interrupted again :

“ Suppose I take you, Glyde, in Estelle’s place ? ” He laughed over the flash of light which the expressive brown eyes gave ; and said to himself that there were possibilities about that girl that he had never seen before. This, while she was saying in tones that trembled with excitement,

“ I ! Oh, Uncle Anthony, you can’t possibly mean it ? ”

“ Yes,” he said decidedly, “ I mean it. You see it isn’t possible for me to wait for Estelle ; and I have set my heart on having some young company along with me this time. What do you say, Esther ? Can’t you and she put some ribbons and things into a bag for her, and let me have her in an hour’s time ? ”

Never were the resources of the Douglass family more fully taxed. To get any one ready for a

journey of some length on an hour's notice is not easy work ; and to get ready a young girl who had never been away from home, and had had no expectation of going, at least not for years to come, and to do it with the limited resources of the house, was an experience to remember.

Glyde brushed her yellow-brown hair in nervous haste, and drove the hairpins into her head as she talked.

“ Mother, do you suppose Estelle would let me take her sack ? I shan't be away but a few days, and what can I have to wear around me if she won't ? ”

“ Why, she will, of course, child ; I'll put it in your satchel. And you take that waist of Fanny's ; it just fits you, and she will be willing for you to have it, I know. You needn't wear it much, unless you have to, but it will make you feel kind of comfortable to have it along.”

“ Oh, mother ! I can't take Fanny's waist ! you don't know how much she thinks of it. Oh, dear ! I don't believe I ought to go. I shall have to borrow so many things from the girls that they have got ready for winter ; and to borrow when they are not here, too. It feels awfully selfish. I don't believe Uncle Anthony would want me, if he knew. I know he hates selfish people, because he is so nice and generous. Mother, isn't it dreadful that Estelle isn't here ? I declare, I could cry for her, if I had time. It will almost break her heart, won't it ? ”

“ She will think she has been dreadfully used,”

said the mother, pushing her own new black stockings, which fitted Glyde, into the bag she was packing. "But it isn't our fault; and I don't know but I'm glad you are going. It doesn't seem right for Estelle and Fanny to get all the good times and you always left out. Sometimes I have thought it was making the girls, especially Estelle, selfish. Glyde where is your best white skirt? I wonder if you let Estelle wear it to go nutting! Why, child, it will be ruined. She will get it all draggled, in this rain. It is too long for her, anyway. I don't see what you will do without it. How came you to let her take it?"

"I didn't let her," laughed Glyde. "It hung there and she took it. Oh I can get along without anything, mother. I believe I would be willing to wear this old red wrapper all the time, for the sake of going. When I think of it all, I feel as though I should fly! Oh, do you suppose I can get ready in time? What if Estelle should be driving up this minute! Then I should have to stay at home. Is it awfully wicked to almost hope that she won't come now until after I am gone?"

"No you wouldn't! I'll be bound if you shall stay at home this time, for Estelle, or any of the rest of them." It was Uncle Anthony who said this; but he muttered it to himself, and only the walls of the room where he was washing his hands heard the words. He had overheard every word to which Glyde and her mother had been saying.

“Esther,” he had said to his sister, “give me a chance wash my hands, will you? I’ve got some of that miserable colored ink on them from a leaky pen. I shall have to throw that pen away I believe.” So his sister had shown him in haste into the room which Estelle and Fanny occupied together, and Clyde unmindful of the transem between that room and the tiny one which belonged to her had talked on in loud eager tones; and her uncle had listened and laughed, and learned some things.

“‘Selfish,’ is she?” he had murmured, in response to the mother’s confession about Estelle. “I shouldn’t wonder; I have suspected as much, myself; and I’ve helped her along in it no doubt; and forgotten all about this little Cinderella left at home. I wish she *would* wear her red wrapper; then she would do for Red Riding Hood; but I don’t want her to meet the bear.” Then he raised his voice: “Come, Cinderella, it is almost time you were ready for the ball; we have to get started before the clock strikes, you know, or the charm will be broken.” And Glyde’s voice sank suddenly to a frightened whisper, as she said: “Oh, *mother!* I forgot he was there. What have I been saying about him? do you remember?”

“Nothing bad, I guess,” said Mrs. Douglass, regarding her youngest daughter with kindly eyes. “You never say mean things about people behind their backs. I’m sure I don’t know what we’ll do without you, Glyde, we are so used to having you at home.”

They worked swiftly while they talked, and in a very brief space of time, the bustle was over, and Glyde was on her way to the station; going to take her first journey of any moment. A very quiet sheltered life had she lived during her nineteen years. The fact that she was the third daughter, had held her back from the most of the gatherings in which her sisters were centres. Her sisters had been so sure that two out of a family was sufficient, and had been so emphatic in their statements to that effect, that there had been nothing for Glyde but submission. Therefore it was almost beyond her belief that she was actually on her way to New York.

Her Uncle Anthony would have been even more pleased than he was, with what he had done, had he realized the pretty flutter that the little girl who tripped at his side was in. A little undertone of almost regret added sweetness to her voice as she talked. Her father's kiss on both cheeks as she bade him good-bye, had been lingering and tender and there had been almost a wistful look in his eyes. Truth to tell, he was a man who of late years had not been able to bid his children good-night without a feeling that perhaps it was good-bye, that he might not be there in the morning. Nothing of this feeling did Glyde realize, or a thousand New Yorks could not have taken her away; she only knew that his kiss was lingering, and his voice low and tender when he bade her good-bye. And her mother had said, "Dear me, child! I am

not used to having my youngest chicken go out from the nest. It seems very queer. I almost wish your uncle hadn't made us do it; and yet I'm real glad to have you go and have a frolic."

Neither mother nor father were given to showing their feeling so plainly, and Glyde as she tripped away, was conscious of a happy little thrill over the thought that she was of a good deal of consequence in the world after all, and that her mother and father would miss her. Then she went immediately to planning about a certain two-dollar bill which had been in her pocket-book ever since Aunt Caroline who was ill and could not go out to purchase gifts, had sent it to her with directions to purchase a birthday present for herself. It had come too late for the birthday, and had been spent, in imagination, on a thousand different things, and was in her pocket yet. Glyde thought of it with little quivers of delight. Of course father and mother and the girls must have some token in remembrance of her trip. She would bring them each a present from New York. She would divide the money equally among them; fifty cents must be able to buy quite a present in that great city where people shopped so much, and where there were such immense stores as she had heard of.

No, she would divide it equally between father and mother; the girls must do without. No, that would not do; she was sure *she* would like a present from New York; she would spend

seventy-five cents each, for father and mother, and have a quarter left for each of the girls. Oh, she did not know how she would manage it; but in some way that two-dollar bill should conduce to the family joy.

CHAPTER IV.

PERPLEXITIES AND DECISIONS.

ONE other home represented in the nutting party had an experience that evening which should be recorded. This was at the Bramlett farm, which was out about two miles from town. Mother and daughter were in the sitting-room plying their needles vigorously, and wishing occasionally that Ralph would come. They lived on an unfrequented road and the father, who had been expected home from a neighboring city by the evening train, had not come. The door-bell interrupted their quiet, and made them look nervously at each other and wonder who that could be. To hear the sound of their door-bell at that hour of the evening was unusual.

“Perhaps it is a tramp!” said Hannah Bramlett who lived on her nerves, and had been on the lookout for thieves and robbers for the past twenty years. However there seemed no alternative but to go to the door. Hannah led the way, her mother following with the lamp; on her passage through the hall she seized an umbrella, with a vague idea of defending themselves. As for

Hannah she contented herself with saying in nervous tones as she unlocked the door: "Ralph ought to be at home before this! It is just like him to stay away half the night and leave us alone."

Then the mother, after the fashion of mothers, began to make excuses.

"Well, but, Hannah, you know he expected father to get home on the evening train."

And then Hannah opened the door and received a yellow-covered envelope. "A dispatch!" gasped both women at once, turning pale with apprehension. Mrs. Bramlett set the lamp on a chair, and herself on the lowest stair, while Hannah, glancing around to say: "Don't be frightened, mother; it's likely from father to tell that he missed the train," tore open the envelope and read:

"Call upon us if possible before twelve o'clock to-morrow morning."

Then she interrupted: "It's for Ralph; from those folks in New York; where he is trying to get a chance in their office, you know. He can't get to them before twelve o'clock to-morrow unless he comes in time for to-night's train; and I don't believe he will; it will be just like him to stay out at Schuyler's all night. That silly crowd he has with him would rather stay than not. It will serve him right if he does; here he has been waiting for a year, nearly, for a chance to get in at this office. There wasn't any sense in his getting up a nutting frolic when father was away and there were so many things to see to.

I don't understand why a man twenty-two years old has to act like a boy of nineteen. Ralph hasn't any more sense than he had four years ago."

The two women went back to the sitting-room where they alternately sewed and read the telegram, studying each word carefully, as though it could offer some suggestions concerning the possibility or rather the impossibility of getting word to Ralph before it should be too late for the train.

"If he doesn't come inside of the next hour," said Hannah at last, as the clock struck eleven, "why, he'll just lose his chance; that's all. And he'll blame us for not getting him word, somehow I s'pose; he always does lay the blame on other folks. But I don't see what we could do."

"There is nothing we can do," said the mother, sorrowfully. "If you were only a boy, Hannah, you could get on old Ben's back and gallop out there, but as it is——"

"If I were a boy," interrupted Hannah, as she flung scissors and thimble into her work-box with a zeal which made them ring, "I could do a thousand things which I can't do now; and if I wasn't different in a good many respects from some boys I know, it would be queer. But I'm nothing but a girl, and there's no use in talking. I don't expect Ralph to-night, and we might as well go to bed first as last. Great use in father being so careful of the horses as to tell Ralph that he needn't come to meet him; he could ride out with the Carters,

and then Ralph goes off with the horses all day, nobody knows how many miles. I never did see such works!"

"Hannah," said her mother with a gentle sigh, "you are twenty-six years old, and you think Ralph is almost as old as you are, but a boy of twenty-two is a good deal younger, remember, than a girl of even the same age, and four years make a great difference."

"I hope they will make a difference in Ralph," said Hannah significantly. Then mother and daughter went to bed. Both of them to lie awake and inwardly groan, because, being women, there was nothing they could do to preserve to the son and brother the "chance" which this telegram might contain.

Even the guests at the Schuyler farmhouse wearied at last, and permitted themselves to be shown to their various rooms. But sleep did not come to all of them, even at that late hour.

Notably was this the case with Ralph Bramlett. When he found himself in darkness and comparative solitude, with time to think, he discovered that his thoughts were anything but agreeable companions. Why had he been such a bear to Marjorie? Why had he allowed the teasing words of Estelle Douglass to have such an influence over him? What in the world did he care what *she* thought about him?

There were his own father and mother who would, to say the least, think it very strange in him to

stay out all night with no better excuse for so doing, than he had to offer.

He tossed from side to side, to the infinite discomfiture of his bedfellow, and went over all the details of the evening with exasperating minuteness. He tried to decide whether Marjorie would be really vexed with him, or at least whether it was a vexation which would last longer than the night. He resolved that, with the very first streak of dawn, he would arouse his party and make all haste to get started homeward. No breakfast for him at the Schuyler farm that morning; and no one knew better than he that he could control the movements of the entire party when he set about it. As soon as ever he had Marjorie beside him, out of hearing of others, he would explain to her certain reasons, which he had evolved out of his night thoughts, why he could not do as she wished. He would tell her how very much he would have preferred carrying out her wishes had it been prudent to have done so. Also he would apologize for the rude way in which he had spoken, and assure her that it all grew out of his anxiety to please her, and the chagrin he felt that he must disappoint her. Having gone over every word that he would utter, and planned answers to her probable replies, and then rearranged the entire conversation for perhaps the dozenth time, he turned over his pillow once more, resolved to get one nap if possible, when he was roused into immediate action by a low tap on his door. A moment more, and he stood

beside it, listening to Miss Schuyler's anxious voice :

“ Oh, Ralph, we don't know what to think ; and mother said I would better tell you at once. Marjorie isn't in her room ! Mother said perhaps you would know what ought to be done.”

“ Not in her room ! ” repeated Ralph in utter bewilderment and consternation. “ Why, where on earth is she, then ? ”

“ That is what we don't know ; she hasn't been there to-night. I mean she hasn't been to bed ; the bed is just as I left it ; not a thing disturbed, and there are no traces in the room of Marjorie having been there.

“ You see, the way we found it out,” continued Miss Schuyler, as Ralph having thrown on his outer-garments with all speed opened wide the door, “ Sister Effie is ill, and mother needed a bottle of medicine which was in the corner closet in the hall-room. She called to me and told me to go in very softly and get it. I went on tip-toe so as not to disturb Marjorie, and you can imagine the start it gave me to discover that she was not there at all. Ralph, what do you think can have become of her ? I've been in every girl's room, since,—thinking that she might have felt lonely and have gone to stay with some of them ; but none of them have seen her since she left the parlor last evening. Do you suppose it possible that she may have started for home, on foot, and all alone ! She was so anxious to go, you know. She told me that she

had never left her mother alone before, and that she had as good as promised her dead father that she never would. I felt very sorry for her, but I did not imagine that she would do any desperate thing."

Ralph Bramlett had no answering word to speak. He strode back into his room, added the finishing touches to his toilet with a speed that would have amazed his sister Hannah, and in a very few minutes more was following "Jim," the half asleep and much aggrieved Schuyler-coachman, to the stables. Never were horses harnessed in more frantic haste. Never was Ralph Bramwell less considerate of the ladies, who gathered about him like bees. The entire nutting party was out, eager to give advice or ask questions.

"You should have thought of that before," he said grimly to Estelle Douglass, when she suggested that she and her sister ride with him, adding that she was afraid father would be kept awake all night worrying about them.

"The time to have thought of him was at ten o'clock last night," he said severely. "It was a very foolish proceeding to stay here all night; there hasn't been a pleasanter night for riding, this fall. I am not going to take any one with me, you can all wait here until I come back; I can get on faster alone."

Saying which, he sprang into the large empty wagon, rattled over the paved drive-way, down the street, and was lost in the darkness. The girls

looked after him in shivering silence ; the moon had set, and it was that gloomy, shivery, indescribably dreary hour before the dawn of a new day.

“Ralph is cross,” ventured Estelle Douglass at last.

“He spoke to us as though we were a company of naughty children in need of a whipping. There is no use in his being so excited ; nothing can have happened to Marjorie, except an extra streak of obstinacy. The road is safe enough between here and town, and the walking is good. Ugh, how cold it is ! One would imagine it was January instead of November ; I think we would all better go back to bed, and pray that Ralph may come for us in a better humor than he was when he left. I must say I pity Marjorie. Ralph Bramlett is a perfect bear when he chooses to be.”

Meantime, the cause of all this excitement was unconscious enough concerning it. It had been no part of her intention to create a sensation ; in fact, she had planned little or nothing concerning the people she left behind. She had petitioned for, and secured, the use of the little hall bedroom, because she had felt that it would be utterly impossible, for that evening, to laugh and talk with those silly girls who had suddenly become distasteful to her. When she slipped away to it, she was conscious that she was in a perfect tumult of pain and indignation.

Anxiety for her mother was undoubtedly uppermost, but there was a wholesome undertone of

astonishment and indignation at Ralph Bramlett. Was she then of so little consequence to him, that the chattering of half a dozen other girls could turn his mind completely away from her wishes? Two hours before, had any one told her that she would petition Ralph Bramlett for a favor within his power to grant, and be denied, she would have smiled incredulously, and wondered what there could be, that she, having common sense, would ask, that *he* would refuse. As far back as her childish recollection reached, she had been able to sway Ralph Bramlett to her moods. It was not that he was not positive enough by nature,—obstinate, many people called him; she had known others to coax for hours and fail to secure what she could obtain by a word and a smile. It had therefore been a revelation to her, and by no means a pleasant one, to find that on this night, when she was not only in serious earnest, but very anxious, she had suddenly failed. She leaned her forehead against the window-pane and looked out on the moonlighted world, and grew more angry every moment. How easily Ralph could have driven home with her, if those chattering idiots really persisted in staying, and have had plenty of time to rest his horses and take some rest himself, before returning for them in the early morning. How sure she had felt that he would hail such a proposition with delight. Was it possible that he actually thought she had gone too far in making it? He had reminded her how con-

spicuous such a proceeding would make them. She remembered this with a blush of shame. She had occasionally objected to plans of his, on that very ground; but never before had Ralph Bramlett been other than delighted at the thought of being made most conspicuously her friend and attendant.

The more she went over in detail his words and looks, the more angry she grew; until at last the idea of submitting to his dictation, and remaining at the farm-house all night, and riding meekly home by his side in the morning, like a naughty child who had tried to have her own way and had failed, became utterly hateful to her. Also, the more she thought of her mother spending the long weary hours of that night, perhaps quite alone in the house; (for, now that she thought of it, possibly not even Mr. Maxwell would be there; there had been some talk in the morning about his being absent that night), the more impossible it seemed that she could permit such a state of things.

“Father would never have done it,” she said aloud and pitifully. “He was so tender of mother; and he trusted me. Oh, if I could only fly!”

It was at that moment that she remembered that although she could not fly, she could walk. She was well and strong, and thought nothing of a walk of several miles for pleasure. What was to hinder her starting at once and making the seven miles which lay between her and home, be-

fore those selfish people downstairs discovered her absence? It was as light as day out of doors, and she knew every foot of the way perfectly; there was really nothing to be afraid of. As she considered it, the idea grew fascinating; what a relief it would be to escape that hateful ride home in the morning, beside Ralph Bramlett. And above all things else how many hours of anxiety could she thus save that precious mother. She had no faith whatever in the plans for an early start; she had heard of plans of this character before; she knew how fond, at least, some of the party were of breakfasts at the Schuyler farmhouse. It would be ten o'clock, perhaps even later, before they could reach home. She would go at once.

Having settled this momentous question she gave herself no time for reconsideration, but slipping quietly into the upper hall selected with nervous fingers her wraps from the heterogeneous mass which had been landed on the sofa in the alcove; then, having arrayed herself, without regard to the mirror, she went softly down the heavily carpeted stairs, and gliding like an unseen ghost past the parlor doors while the merriment there was still at its height, took the precaution to make her way through the deserted dining-room to a side entrance; she then crossed the lawn, and the meadow next to it, and so gained the road by the corner farthest from the parlor windows, and began her walk.

CHAPTER V.

SHADOWS AND "CHARMS."

It is doubtful if Marjorie Edmonds, though she live to be an old woman, will ever forget the experiences of that night. Though by no means a timid person, her life had been a carefully guarded one in some respects, and she was now having her first experience of being on a deserted street alone at night. She had no conception of how the loneliness would affect her, or assuredly she would have reconsidered even then. She ran a few steps, in her foolish fear that she might be seen and captured by her friends, but soon discovered that she must not waste strength in that way; in her excited state of mind she lost her breath so quickly as to alarm her. She tried to reason her fears away. Why should she be afraid? The night was so still, so *very* still that even the common ordinary sounds of nature seemed to be lacking, and the very silence alarmed her. Then the trees had long naked arms which they waved at her; a ghastly stump in the near distance took human shape and silently beckoned to her in the moonlight. A great dog barked fiercely in the far distance, but seemed to her overwrought nerves to

be bounding toward her. She could almost feel his hot breath on her burning face. Those awful silent shadows among the trees waved their arms, and mocked at her. *Were* they silent? She thought she heard them laughing. In short, common sense seemed for the time being to utterly desert this young woman, and leave her a prey to all sorts of imaginations which had heretofore been unknown to her. Before she had accomplished a third of the distance, if she had not by that time become equally afraid of all directions she would have turned back. Once she made a full stop and considered the advisability of doing so; then a curious feeling came over her that it would be impossible to meet again the horrors through which she had already passed. Better unknown terrors than these; so she sped on. Yet that is hardly the word to use; there was not much speed. She found herself compelled to walk comparatively slowly; her heart beat so hard that it seemed to take her strength. At times there came to her a terrible fear that she would faint dead away by the roadside; then, what might *not* happen to her before the morning dawned! Once she looked up appealingly at the moon, and was beset with a new fear. It was traveling fast, and might be near its setting. What if it should leave her in the darkness? better all those mocking shadows than this. At last she neared the Houston farm; not quite half the distance accomplished. Could she possibly endure another hour like the last one? Should she stop

at the Houston farm, tell her pitiful story and ask shelter until morning? How humiliating such a course would be! How the Douglass girls would laugh at her, and possibly even Ralph Bramlett would sneer. Still, it may be that her fears would have gotten the better of her pride, had they not been at that moment turned into a new channel. Distinctly on the silent air came the baying of dogs. She remembered to have heard that the Houstons kept watch-dogs—fierce ones; they might tear her in pieces before she could make herself heard. She could not venture to seek help there. There was nothing for it but to go on; since she had lived through half of the way, it was possible that she might reach home alive after all. She tried to think that she was becoming less terror-stricken; growing accustomed to those horrid skeletons who continually waved and grinned at her in the distance, and developed into commonplace leafless branches as she neared them.

She went on faster for some minutes, or hours, it seemed to her; then a new terror defined itself. The unmistakable approach of horse's feet in the distance; no sound of wheels, a horseman riding fast. What *should* she do? She, a woman, alone, in the dead of night, on the public street! Suppose the rider should speak to her, should stop? Oh for some friendly tree behind which to hide! The skeletons now had lost their terror for her, with the first approach of real, tangible danger, they became friends, but it so happened that she had

reached a stretch of road where no trees were, and the horseman was coming very swiftly. Curiously enough for the first time that night the girl realized how unfair she had been to her mother by putting herself in such a position of possible danger as this. She knew instinctively that her mother would rather spend a hundred nights alone, than have her daughter voluntarily place herself where insult was possible. In the few minutes which intervened while those rapid feet were nearing her, it seemed to Marjorie that every horrible story she had ever heard or read, connected with night, and darkness, and sin, came rushing to memory. Oh, what *should* she do! If the rider should speak to her, she would scream so loud that they must hear her in town, or at some farm-house surely. A sense of faintness was coming over her, but she battled with it and put it sternly away; this was no time for fainting; she must have all her senses in order and use them well. It was possible, of course, that the belated traveler was a respectable person, who would pass her in swift silence. But he did not, he reined in his horse as he drew near.

“Miss Edmonds, is it not?” said a voice which she recognized on the instant, and at the sound of which all inclination to scream departed from her. Before she could gather breath to make reply he added: “You recognize me, do you not? I am Mr. Maxwell.” As he spoke he dismounted, and throwing Selim’s bridle over his arm came toward her.

"Oh, I am afraid I have frightened you!" he said, for Marjorie had dropped, a limp heap, on the ground. "Do not be alarmed because I am here; nothing is wrong with your mother; but she was anxious over your detention and I volunteered to bring her word from you. Are you faint, Miss Edmonds? I am afraid I have frightened you very much. I thought you would perhaps recognize my voice and so not be alarmed."

"I did," said Marjorie "I am not frightened, not now;" and she struggled to her feet trembling in every limb.

"I was *awfully* frightened, Mr. Maxwell," she said, speaking between nervous shudders, "not at you but at—everything; when I heard the sound of horse's feet and knew a man must be coming, it was terrible! but now that he is here I am not at all afraid!"

The remarkable seeming contradiction in this sentence struck her ludicrously as she said it, and she was nervous enough to laugh outright.

Mr. Maxwell joined in the laugh; it was the easiest and quickest way to quiet nerves. Marjorie sobered on the instant, and was ready with anxious questionings and explanations.

"Is my mother very much frightened Mr. Maxwell? Oh, I am afraid it will make her ill. I tried so hard to get home earlier, indeed, it was not my fault. You can know how anxious I was, by my being willing to start away alone."

"I can understand that better than I can your

being permitted to do it," said Mr. Maxwell, speaking some thoughts which he meant to have kept to himself. He made haste to add: "Naturally, your mother is anxious; but we shall be at home so soon now, that I cannot think any harm will result. Are you a good walker, on occasion, Miss Edmonds? Selim would be delighted to carry you, but I believe you do not ride?"

They made quick time after that. Marjorie's feet had regained their courage and she found no difficulty in keeping step with her companion. Also, her fears had departed. The skeletons had retired affrighted; in their places were only prosaic-looking trees whose bare branches might wave as they would, she cared not. There passed a horseman who looked curiously at the two, making quick steps over the road, with a horse pacing haughtily along by their side; there came a wagon loaded with revelers, who sang and shouted as they passed, but Marjorie only noticed them to think how frightened she would have been under other circumstances.

She tried to give Mr. Maxwell a history of her experiences; she tried to make light of her fears; but the memory of them was too vivid; and it became apparent to her escort that she was still very much excited.

"I wonder if you are not acquainted with my talisman?" he said cheerily. "When I was a little fellow it was my fortune to be much alone. One of my duties involved a long walk daily, or

rather nightly, for it was after the sun had set,—through a piece of woods where the shadows were dense. I appreciate your statement about the trees waving their arms at you. Mine went farther than that; they shrieked, and howled, on occasion, and sometimes called after me; at least, so I had seasons of almost believing. I do not suppose there was any very real danger, though occasionally a bear did prowl about those woods, but my fears were as real as though the danger had been imminent, and I suffered from them in a way that unimaginative people cannot understand. One night I found a talisman; it worked grandly, and has served me a good turn many a time since, when I was in real peril. It is associated in my mind with my dear old grandmother. Have you a grandmother, Miss Edmonds? I consider a life defrauded of a large portion of its joys that cannot look back to grandmother's room as a place for comfort, and grandmother's prayers as a stronghold. Curiously enough mine was the only one to whom I was willing to confide my fears. I think I desired to pose as a hero before my dear mother; father was absent from home much of the time, and I was her care-taker; not for the world would I have hinted to her that that half-mile walk was one of terror, at times; but my grandmother was little and old, and could not walk at all, and seemed to be young enough to understand all my feelings. One night, as I said, she gave me a charm."

“I have heard of charms,” said Marjorie, trying to be merry. “Do you wear it about with you, Mr. Maxwell? And could you lend it, do you think? Because if I were ever to be caught in this way again, I am sure I should need it. Indeed, I feel as though I could never go through such an experience as this again.”

The voice which had begun with a merry note, turned to gravity and Marjorie shivered sensibly; evidently she had not yet regained the healthy poise of her usual condition. Her companion made haste to speak cheerily.

“I would not think of it, Miss Edmonds; it is highly improbable that you will be called upon to take night-walks through the country alone. But about the charm; I wear it constantly, engraved where it can never be erased. Yet it is a very simple little thing and you can, at will, be furnished with it. These are the words which compose it: ‘What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee.’ I do not know that I can make you understand what a revelation it was to me, when my grandmother first succeeded in getting it into my heart that God actually cared for me every minute; watched over my goings and comings, and was near at hand for me to speak to whenever I would, so that in reality it was impossible for me to take walks alone. ‘If you *ought* to be going that way,’ said the dear old lady, and I can seem at this moment to hear her impressive voice, and see her small withered forefinger upheld for emphasis. ‘If you ought to be

going that way, then be sure He is going along with you; and you need not even whisper, to get His attention. He hears your heart beat and knows all about it. But it is a great comfort to speak to Him, my boy.'—I found it so, Miss Edmonds, and, as I said, the blessed fact has gone with me through the years."

Marjorie Edmonds was absolutely silent. She had no words with which to meet such an experience as this. Truth to tell, she knew nothing about God as a living, present reality. Many of her friends, young people like herself, were professors of religion, and it will have to be confessed that Marjorie, perhaps without realizing it, had prided herself on the fact that she was not.

"Why should I join the Church?" she had asked lightly of a girl-friend, who, during the time of special interest following the week of prayer, had urged her to this step. "I do not see the slightest difference in you since you joined, save that you go to the communion service when you feel like it. As for me, I have obligations enough now which I do not meet, to undertake any new ones. At least, until I see occasion for doing so."

This was not altogether sincere; no one knew better than Marjorie Edmonds that there was such a thing as vital religion. Mother and father had lived it before her through all the years of her recollection. It is true, her mother's training, and possibly her temperament made her more

reserved upon this subject than any other; still the controlling motive-power of her life was Jesus Christ, and Marjorie knew it. But aside from her mother, Marjorie's experience among professed Christians was perhaps unfortunate. She had a high ideal, and often said to herself, and occasionally aloud, that if she ever did become a Christian she would be a different one from any with whom she was acquainted. She always made a mental reservation of her parents, her pastor, and possibly two or three others; but all of these were old; or at least they were much older than she, and she had allowed herself to more than half believe that religion, or, at least, consistent living was for the old; therefore she would wait until there would be some hope of her being consistent, before she would make the attempt.

But Mr. Maxwell was young; he could not be very much older than Ralph Bramlett himself; and his manner of speaking of these things was new to her. He had a sort of quiet assurance, a matter-of-course way of talking of religion as he would of any other subject. Moreover, he spoke of God as though He were a real, ever-present friend, instead of a far-away solemnity to be spoken of and thought about as little as possible. This, she confessed to herself, was the way in which she habitually thought of him.

"I do not think I know how to use your talisman," she said timidly, and wished that he would talk of something else. By way of helping him

to do so, she began an eager account of the day's pleasuring, entering into a detailed description of the beauty of the glen where their lunch was spread, and the lovely fire they had built to roast their corn, and the picturesqueness of the whole scene, with their coffee-pail hung on an improvised crane, made of pointed sticks interlaced.

"A regular gypsy-camp, Mr. Maxwell," she said. "The great pail in which we had our coffee swayed back and forth over the coals just as I have seemed to see it do in pictures of gypsy encampments. All we lacked was the old fortune-teller. I thought at one time of personating her. You should have been with us, if you like strange, and almost uncanny views in nature. You have heard of the place, have you not? It has a good deal of local fame. There is a hill ever so high just back of the glen; almost a mountain it might be called, and rocks with great jagged fissures in them. There are some fine specimens to be found in that region, the wise ones say. Aren't you a geologist, Mr. Maxwell?"

"Oh, no, I know nothing about geology, except at second hand; I ask questions occasionally, and pick up disconnected bits of information in that way. But I love to look at those great solid rocks that have stood there for ages, and imagine things about them."

"Our day was all lovely until that storm came on. What a terrific storm it was! I was so worried not to be at home on mother's account. She

is inclined to be nervous during a thunder-storm. Were you at home during the rain, and did you see my mother ?”

With these and kindred subjects she kept up a steady flow of words, and as she had by this time regained her wonted strength they walked rapidly, and very soon turning a corner the lights from the home windows streamed out upon them.

CHAPTER VI.

HOME-COMINGS.

WHEN her foot touched the lower step, Marjorie heard the click of the lock, and in another moment her mother's arms were around her, and "Oh, mother!" and "Oh, my daughter!" came simultaneously from their lips.

"You see," said Mr. Maxwell, "I have kept my word and brought her back to you in safety."

His voice recalled them to the knowledge of his presence, and Mrs. Edmonds broke off in the midst of the questions she was eagerly asking, to give attention to her benefactor. Was Mr. Maxwell still planning to take that long ride across the country?

No; he had decided to wait until another day. There were reasons why it would be pleasanter to make a very early start. He was anxious to get a view of the sunrise at a certain famous point, and the sun would be in too much haste for him this morning.

Then there was no reason why he should not take a very early breakfast with them as soon as he had cared for his horse.

Mrs. Edmonds, having finished with Gideon,

had further employed herself in resurrecting the kitchen fire and rearranging her culinary arrangements, making a breakfast instead of a supper, and laying the table for three, instead of the usual two. Surely, Mr. Maxwell would be persuaded to join them; it would be several hours yet before his regular breakfast time, and he must be quite faint with his long walk.

He was not in the least faint, he assured her, and was used to long walks at almost any hour of the day or night. But the table set in the back parlor made a very inviting picture, and the odor of something savory was already in the air. There was no reason why he should not enjoy an unusual breakfast at this unusual hour, and he promptly accepted the invitation; then went to "explain matters to Selim," leaving mother and daughter to themselves.

"Oh, mother!" said Marjorie with her arms about the mother's neck again as soon as the door closed after Mr. Maxwell, "I have had such a time! You cannot think how hard I tried to get here at a reasonable hour and in a reasonable way. I was so troubled about you and so indignant. I never imagined that—people"—with a perceptible pause before she decided upon the noun to use—"could be so silly and disagreeable. I can't think what was the matter with—them."

Said Mrs. Edmonds, "They will be frightened, dear, will they not, when they find that you are gone?"

“I hope so!” was the savage answer; “they deserve to be frightened after doing such an utterly absurd thing as to stay there all night.” Then, apparently summoning her resolution, she added: “Mother, Ralph was hateful beyond anything I could have believed possible.” At which information Mrs. Edmonds preserved a discreet silence.

Within a very short time thereafter, three people were seated at the coziest breakfast-table which could have been found,—at least at that hour of the morning.

It was when Mr. Maxwell was taking his second cup of coffee, and remarking that there were possibilities, evidently, in coffee, of which people who boarded did not dream, that there came a sharp peal of the door-bell which caused mother and daughter to give little nervous starts and look at each other.

“It is an early hour for a call,” said Mr. Maxwell, noticing the glances, and rising as he spoke, “I think you would better let me answer that bell.”

A moment afterwards, from the wide-open door, Ralph Bramlett had a view which photographed itself upon his memory. A cozy dining-room whose breakfast-table he had often pictured to himself, and wondered how it would seem to be enough at home there to be a breakfast-table guest; mother and daughter seated thereat, and, opposite the daughter, a place which had evidently just been vacated; and Mr. Maxwell, napkin in hand, standing at his ease before him saying in quiet,

matter-of-course tones, "Oh, yes, Miss Edmonds is at home and quite safe. Nothing serious happened to her, I believe, although naturally the necessity for taking a walk alone at that time of night was not agreeable to a lady. Will you walk in, Mr. Bramlett, and see the ladies?"

"No," said Ralph curtly, "there seems to be no occasion for my presence." The poor fellow noted as he spoke that Marjorie did not even turn her head at the sound of his voice. It made his next sentence more savage. "She has given us a precious scare; but since she is all right, of course that is of no consequence."

And then Ralph Bramlett turned and strode out into the gray dawn, and climbed into his lonesome wagon, more thoroughly out of sorts with himself and with Marjorie, and above all with Mr. Maxwell, than can be described. In excuse for him let it be remembered that he had had a trying night, and a very nerve-disturbing ride. As he rattled at reckless speed over the road visions of all the uncanny things he had ever heard about the night and the darkness seemed to come hurrying before him. What if Marjorie had fallen in with a company of drunken revellers on their way home from the races? What if she had fallen, and hurt herself, and lay unconscious under some of these gloomy trees? Still, this latter fancy did not disturb him long; he was entirely familiar with the road, and rapidly as he was driving, no clump of trees, or hiding-place of any sort escaped him. Marjorie

was not in visible shape anywhere along his way ; of this he was certain. But what then had become of her ? It did not seem to him possible that she could have managed all the distance alone, and in the darkness, and have actually reached home ; so, as he neared the town and still saw no trace of the missing one, his nerves became almost as much out of order as Marjorie's own. Therefore, to find her seated comfortably at a cozy breakfast-table was both a relief and a shock to him.

Never was gloomier ride taken than he took that morning back to the Schuyler farm. In the first place, he had an absolute horror of going back to meet those chattering girls and silly boys. He considered the feasibility of driving home and sending Ben, their man-of-all-work, in his place ; but the explanations which would necessarily result, not only to his father and mother, but to Hannah, and also the merciless fire of ridicule which he would have to receive eventually from the tongue of Estelle Douglass, held him from this course. He "might as well go back at once and meet the idiots and have it over with," he muttered to himself. And as he drove wearily over the road, he added that it would be many a day before he would lend himself to an escapade of theirs again. Have some pity for Ralph Bramlett, for he was in sore need of it. Only too vividly did he realize his mistake of the night before. Who would have imagined that Marjorie was so anxious to get home ! He had supposed that she would fret about

it for a few minutes, like other girls ; but that when she found that her way was hedged and she in no wise to blame, would cast it aside, and have a merry evening with the rest. And how he had looked forward to that morning ride with Marjorie sitting beside him watching the sunrise ! Now the first streaks of red were gilding the eastern sky, but he did not so much as turn his head to give the monarch of the day a glance. What did he care for sunrises ? He had seen too many of them alone ; this sunrise was to have been gilded with Marjorie's presence, and he had deliberately put her from him ! This was his mood for a few minutes at a time ; at others, he blamed her severely. One moment, he sternly assured himself that she would have to apologize for this night's work if she wished to retain his friendship ; the next, he felt a cold shiver creeping over him at the thought that possibly she was really and permanently offended. What if she should break with him ? But that was folly. It could not be that she cared so little for him.

“If she should,” he told himself bitterly “I should know the reason. It will be because that meddling stranger to whom they rented rooms has been paying her attention and turned her head. What do they know about him ? What right has he at their table at this hour of the morning ? And to come mincing out to me to tell me that she was entirely safe and comfortable ! What business was it of his ? What right have they to

let an entire stranger into their family circle in this way? I have known Marjorie Edmonds ever since she was a baby and I have never been at their breakfast-table."

On the whole, the ride back was fully as uncomfortable, though in a different way, as the hurried rush to town had been.

Very little satisfaction did the eager group which was seated at the Schuyler breakfast-table when he returned, get from him. Beyond the bare fact that Marjorie was at home, and quite safe, they could get no information, cross-question as they would. In point of fact Ralph Bramlett had no information to give. His own indignation had prevented him from hearing particulars.

"He is a perfect savage!" said Estelle Douglass gathering her wraps in great indignation, as the girls informed her that Ralph said whoever was not ready to go in five minutes would be left behind. "He is a perfect savage, this morning. I never knew before that he could be so ungentlemanly. I believe he and Marjorie have had a quarrel; nothing else will account for such a bearish state of mind. I don't see why he should want to visit her sins on us; we are not to blame."

In point of fact, none of the excursionists enjoyed the homeward ride as they had planned the night before that they would do. The glamour of night and moonlight were gone; it was prosaic daylight, and for some of them the day's cares were waiting and would be the heavier because of this late be-

ginning. The Douglass girls, now that the excitement was over, had an uncomfortable feeling that they had deprived their father of a good night's rest; and each confessed secretly that it was a shame to take their pleasure at the expense of an invalid's sleep. Of course it was ridiculous for father to be so nervous over them. They had said so, dozens of times, and had done what they could to educate him to a knowledge of the uncertainty of their comings; still the fact of his "nervousness" remained, and they knew it. To add to Estelle Douglass' discomfort there was an unpleasant consciousness on her part that she was to blame for the night's detention and the embarrassments which had resulted. It was of no use for her to assure herself that Ralph need not have stayed if he had not chosen, no matter what she said. No one was more conscious than she of the power that ridicule had over Ralph, or was more eager to show her influence over him. There was a source of disappointment, also, known only to herself; in the depths of her heart had been an intention to soothe and comfort Ralph this morning; to speak just the words which she felt he needed in order to reinstate him in his good opinion of himself; and in short, to show herself so marked a contrast to Marjorie that he could not fail to note the difference between them. During her period of waiting, she had even planned some of the words she would say to him, and, presuming upon his probable replies, had carried on quite an

extended conversation, with such satisfactory results that by the time they, in imagination, reached home, she and Ralph had become better friends than ever before; even confidential friends. Of course this plan involved her occupying the seat which Marjorie's flight had left vacant; but the facts in the case were that she had a seat as far away from Ralph as could well be managed. She was the last one to come downstairs, as indeed she always was, and Ralph had without ceremony and with much speed seated his company before she appeared; dumping that "dull little Belle Finlay" into the vacant seat beside himself. As Belle Finlay was entirely satisfied to ride for miles, if necessary, without speaking, and looked upon Ralph much as she did upon her brother, that young man was able to continue his gloomy thoughts during much of the homeward journey. Not one of the party felt merry; the reaction from late hours and undue excitement was upon them. To add to their discomfort, the sun, which although unnoticed, had risen in glory, soon retired behind dull gray clouds, and before they were half-way to town a dreary rain began to fall. Not a majestic shower with splendid spectacular accompaniments compelling their attention, as on the night before, but a slow fine November drizzle, chilling them to the bone.

"I never was so glad to get home in my life!" was Estelle Douglass's exclamation as she shook the raindrops from her and shivered.

“Wasn’t it a horrid drive? I believe Ralph came as slow as he could so as to add to our discomfort as much as possible. Hasn’t he behaved like a South Sea Islander, or some other uncivilized being, ever since Marjorie disappeared?”

“Disappeared!” said Mrs. Douglass, catching the last word as she came to the assistance of her daughters. “What has happened to Marjorie? Why, child, you are wet to the skin! You must have held the umbrella so that it dripped right down your back, instead of protecting you. And I am afraid your dress is spoiled; the lining from your sack has discolored it. What a pity that you wore that dress! Fanny, your sack is streaked, too. Dear me! What a condition to get home in. Why didn’t you come last night?”

“We couldn’t,” said Estelle briefly. After a moment, during which she was engaged in discovering how seriously the skirt she had “borrowed” without leave, was mud-stained, she added: “Didn’t you see and hear it rain last night? Of course you didn’t expect us after that. I never saw it rain harder.”

“Why, we did not so early, of course, but by ten o’clock the rain was over. Your father lay awake watching for every sound. His head is very bad this morning, and he had a poor turn with his heart just about daylight. That’s no wonder though, after such a night. It was after midnight when your——”

Then Fanny interrupted her. “Mother, do help

me get off this horrid sack. It is so wet it sticks to my dress as though it were glued. Is father worse, did you say? I don't see why he has to lie awake and fret about us. We shall get so by and by that we will have to play Marjorie Edmonds' role when we are out in the evening."

"What did you say had happened to Marjorie? No accident, I hope?"

"Nothing happened to her except to act like an idiot, and create a sensation which will last, I don't know how long, in its effects. She was determined to get home, it seems, although Ralph was afraid of another thunder-storm and did not like to take the horses out. So she came home on foot, in the middle of the night."

"On foot!" said Mrs. Douglass in amazement and dismay. "Why, the poor child! not alone? Dear me! What a state she must have been in! I don't think much of the gentlemen you had with you, to let her do it."

"Why they didn't know about it," explained Fanny. "We none of us knew anything about it. We didn't think of such a thing."

She attempted to make the facts plain to the mother; but Estelle, who was hunting through drawers and boxes for certain articles of clothing, interrupted:

"Do, Fanny, let us have a rest from that subject for a little while. I'm tired of it; aren't you? Mother, can you imagine where my brown skirt is? Where is Glyde? I wonder if she has had it."

“Glyde!” said Mrs. Douglass brought suddenly face to face with her tremendous news; “why, she has gone to New York.”

And now the feelings of Estelle Douglass must be imagined; they cannot be described.

CHAPTER VII.

“WHAT NEXT?”

“WELL,” said Uncle Anthony as he tried to tilt back in what he called a “biscuit” chair which was in Glyde’s room on the third floor of a large hotel, and surveyed her expectant face with a mixture of amusement and satisfaction, “what next? I suppose you have had a dull day; it is beyond me to understand what you could have found to amuse you; but to judge from your story and your face you have had excellent success; and my qualms of conscience over your loneliness have been wasted.”

Glyde laughed gleefully. “I never thought of being lonely,” she said. “There were so many things to look at out of the windows; and such crowds of people passing all the time. It did not seem possible that they could all know just exactly where they wanted to go, and what they wanted to do.”

Her uncle laughed, but said, with a shade of gravity in his voice: “It is safe to state that about one-third of them were going exactly where they ought not, and another third were doing

exactly what they didn't want to. That is about the proportion in New York, I think."

It was the evening of their first day in the city. Uncle Anthony, having established his travelling companion in excellent quarters and surrounded her with what was, to her, the very extravagance of luxury, had been obliged to leave her quite to herself during business hours. He had rushed from one point to another in extreme haste, all the time distressed by the thought that the "little girl" as he called her in his thoughts, whom he had brought away from home and mother for the first time in her life must have such a wretched beginning to her holiday. It was, therefore, a happy surprise on returning to the hotel just in time for dinner, to find her face as bright as the day had been. While they were at dinner she gave him eager descriptions of the wonders she had seen from the windows. In this, as in all other respects, she was a contrast to her sister Estelle. When, on a memorable occasion he took that young lady to Syracuse with him, he remembered she had found the hours that she had been compelled to solitude, with no other employment than window-gazing, such intolerable bores as to lead him at times to seriously doubt whether the delightful evenings and the few hours of daylight which he could spare her, were sufficient compensation for such martyrdom. Yet her windows had been much more hopeful of possible entertainment than were Glyde's.

That young lady regarded him with a serious, half wistful look in response to the alarming statement he made about the people she had watched, and said timidly : “ They all looked comfortable, Uncle Anthony ; I was thinking about that, this afternoon. I have heard and read a good many things about the poor of New York ; but I haven’t seen a single really ill-dressed or very doleful looking person this entire day. They all hurried by as though they knew just where to go, and how to plan for themselves.”

Uncle Anthony laughed again. “ You are not in the right quarter of the city to see the sights in the way of dress, for instance, of either extreme,” he said. “ I could take you to portions of this interesting town where you would get a glimpse of the poor ; but I think we will try to do something pleasanter, at least this evening. I suppose you would like to go to the theatre ? Have you selected the point you want to aim for ? You received the evening paper I sent up, didn’t you ? Where is it ? I haven’t had time to see what is going on.”

“ Here is the paper Uncle Anthony, but——”

He noticed at once the change of tone, and turned quickly and looked at her.

“ Well,” he said, “ what is it ? Have you some other plan ? Let us have it, in that case. I have no object in view except to give you as pleasant an evening as I can. I mentioned the theatre, because that is always Estelle’s first thought. Where do you want to go ? ”

“Oh, I haven't any plans, Uncle Anthony, and I want to go where ever you wish to take me; only I thought——” she stopped again, It seemed difficult for her to frame sentences to her satisfaction.

Her uncle waited, however, apparently not intending to assist her, and she began again.

“Uncle Anthony I had almost decided that I would not go to theatres.”

“The mischief you had! I did not know that you had had an opportunity. Do they have theatres in your town?”

“Oh, travelling ones occasionally; every winter, indeed. But I did not mean those. I meant that I would not go even though I had an opportunity to come to New York, for instance, though I never expected to come here.”

“And am I to be informed why this tremendous decision was reached? Don't your tastes lie in that direction?”

“Yes, I think they do. I should not be surprised if they lay very much in that direction; though I have never had opportunity to decide for myself. But I like anything in the line of acting. When we girls used to have, at school, and in our societies, what we called private theatricals, I became so fond of them that while we were preparing for an entertainment, I could hardly think of anything else. But the reason I had almost decided that I would not go, was because—well—I am a member of the church, you know.”

“No, I was not aware of it; but what has that to do with the matter? So is your sister Estelle, I believe.”

“Yes, but she and Fannie have been members of the church for a number of years; and I only united last winter.”

“Ah, am I to understand that one has to remain away from theatres and places of that sort for a term of years after uniting with the church; and then are at liberty to begin again?”

Glyde laughed pleasantly. “Oh, Uncle Anthony! of course not. I’m sure I don’t know how to tell you what I mean. I am not like Estelle and Fanny. I mean I don’t think as they do about some things. I know they are older, but then——”

She stopped in evident embarrassment. She recognized the apparent egotism in that last sentence, and did not seem to know how to make her position clear.

But Uncle Anthony only looked at her with his keen gray eyes, and waited. So she began again. “Uncle Anthony, when people unite with the church, they promise, you know, to walk in love, with that particular church, and be guided by its advice. At least the covenant of our church has some such sentences. Not guided contrary to their own consciences, of course; but, I mean, they promise to consider carefully what that church thinks, and agree with it if they can. Now, I know that Dr. Ford, our pastor, doesn’t attend theatres and doesn’t approve of them; neither do certain other

members of our church; some who are reckoned among the wisest and best people we have. I thought there must be good reasons for their position. They all have young people in their families, who join heartily in other pleasures. Once, last winter, I was invited to attend a theatre; it was a very good play, they said, and a great many of our young people went. I declined the invitation, because I thought I had promised to be guided by the views of the church in such matters, and that the pastor represented the church. Estelle and Fanny did not agree with me, they laughed at me indeed. Estelle said it showed that I had a very weak nature, or that I was making a mere puppet of myself, not claiming to have any views of my own. And when I came to think about it carefully I found it true enough that I had no particular views on the subject because I knew very little about it. I didn't feel quite as Estelle did, about taking advice; because what is the use of giving advice if people are never to take it? Still, I knew it was the right thing to have settled opinions for one's self; so I borrowed a book about theatres, that I had seen in Dr. Ford's study, and read it carefully. And really, Uncle Anthony, if the half that that book said was true, I shouldn't think any self-respecting people would frequent the theatre. Why I don't mean that, of course,"—pausing suddenly while her face flushed crimson over the thought that Uncle Anthony took Estelle to the theatre every evening while they were in Syracuse, "but

I mean I don't understand how people can make a business of going.”

“Probably the book was written by some fanatic who had never been inside a theatre in his life,” volunteered Uncle Anthony; more, it must be confessed, for the purpose of seeing what this new niece would say next, than because of any deep personal interest in the matter.

“Oh, no, it wasn't; he had been to a good many of them; and had studied the plays most carefully as they are presented, and knew a great deal about them. I asked Dr. Ford about it afterwards; and he said that every one who had given attention to the matter knew that the statements made in that book could not be contradicted. He said attempts had been made to contradict them which had proved utter failures. After that I read several newspaper and magazine articles in the same line. I remember it seemed to me as though items about the theatre kept falling into my hands without my looking for them; but of course it just happened so.”

“And so you *almost* decided never to go?” her uncle said, looking at her with a twinkle in his handsome gray eyes. “How much ground is that ‘almost’ supposed to cover?”

“Why, I didn't positively say that I would never go. Nobody has talked with me about it, except Estelle and Fanny, and of course they didn't care how I decided it. I have never been invited to go but just twice; so I haven't had much tempta-

tion. Estelle said she would risk me if I ever got a chance to go to a real city theatre. But what I decided was, that unless something happened, that is, unless I read some books or had a talk with people whom I trusted, who could assure me that much which had been said in that book and other books against theatres was false, why, I should just not go to them ; that is all."

"Don't depend upon me to try to change your views," her uncle said dryly, "I shall not undertake the task."

Glyde laughed a slightly embarrassed laugh, and began again in a deprecating tone :

"Uncle Anthony, I hope I have not made you think that I would like to keep you away from anything which you wish to do. Won't you please go out to-night just as usual? I promise you I shall not be in the least homesick or lonely. I must finish my letter to mother; and then, I saw a book downstairs which I am sure I can borrow. The lady who was there this afternoon asked me if I had ever read it, and said she knew I would like it. Won't you *please*, Uncle Anthony, act just as though I wasn't here?"

Her uncle laughed good-naturedly.

"Won't I please go off to the theatre by myself and leave the little girl I brought along to amuse me, to play alone, eh? Not if I am acquainted with myself! My child, you need have no compunctions of conscience over me; the theatres which I have attended during the last seven years

have been perfect bores to me. I have gone chiefly to please some niece, or cousin, or young friend whom I had in charge. I shall be entirely willing to take up some new rôle. What shall it be, a prayer-meeting?”

He was teasing her; she saw the fun in his eyes; but she laughed merrily. It was winsome teasing, with nothing bitter about it. She rather enjoyed it.

Following the laugh, she said: “You are making fun of me, Uncle Anthony, I know that; but to be real honest, I have thought that some time I should like to go to a very large city prayer-meeting, such as I suppose they must have in these great churches in New York. I have read of prayer-meetings which it seemed to me it must be a perfect delight to attend. I don’t mean to-night, of course; and indeed I don’t mean to insist on you taking me at any time. I am ready to go wherever you would like to go; or to stay at home with you and let you rest. I truly haven’t any pet schemes which must be carried out. I believe you think I am a little bit of a girl, who must have the particular toy that I want to play with, or I shall go off in a corner and pout.”

“No,” he said emphatically, “on my word I don’t. I haven’t seen a pouting streak in your make-up. A prayer-meeting, eh? That’s entirely out of my line; never in all my experiences with nieces have I been called upon to produce one before; but we ought to be able to find one within

reaching distance, I should think. If I mistake not this is the regulation night in this city, for entertainments of that character; I have run across one, once or twice in a business way, I remember. We'll sally out and see what we can do."

As Glyde settled her pretty hat before the mirror and slipped her arms dextrously into her sister's sack and hunted eagerly for the pair of gloves which suited her best for evening wear, her uncle watched her with a curious mixture on his face of amusement and tenderness. A close observer would have been sure to have noted the touch of sadness also. Some sweet past memory had been awakened and was tugging at his heart. Had he spoken the words which floated through his mind they would have been something after this fashion:

"So this is a new type of niece altogether! Takes me back eight, nine, how many years? She is like her Aunt Estelle. Queer that the other one should look like her, and this one be like her! I thought the type had gone out of style. My little girl had very much the same notions about theatres, I remember, with neither pastor, nor books, to help her to her conclusions. She did not like some of the things she saw there, and so would have none of them. She was a positive little woman, yet with gentle ways about her positiveness, much as this one has. I have not seen anything of the kind since."

The soliloquy closed with a sigh; but it was

not so heavy as the lonely man's sighs were apt to be when his thoughts strayed into his precious past ; he was conscious of a new interest in life. Up to this time he had petted Estelle because she bore the charmed name, and finding her totally different from his original, had told himself that he must expect nothing else ; there were no girls in these days like his Estelle. He thought of her as though she had been gone from the earth for generations, as indeed it sometimes seemed to him that she had. But here was a revelation. Behold his niece, Glyde, whom he had hitherto noticed at all, simply because she was his favorite sister's daughter, and with whom he had not exchanged a dozen words connectedly since she emerged from childhood ; now she was blossoming before him into something like his ideal young womanhood. At least she strongly suggested it, and it would be worth studying, to see how much they really were alike. He had discovered her by a happy accident. Whatever it was which had detained the nutting party—he hoped of course that nothing unpleasant had happened,—but he owed them all a vote of thanks for having discovered to him this particular niece, whom he would take care not to lose again.

CHAPTER VIII.

“THE YOUNG MAN HAS COME.”

“So you have on your sister’s sack?” he said, as Glyde turned presently from the mirror, and, daintily gloved, announced herself quite ready. Her face flushed crimson under his question and his critical survey.

“Oh, Uncle Anthony!” she said pitifully, “How did you know?”

“Why the transom was open, you remember, and I heard things unlawful for a guest to hear; never mind; you did not say anything that I shall not forgive. How does the sack fit?”

“Perfectly. Estelle and I have the same figure, though I am a trifle taller than she. Doesn’t it look well on me?”

“I don’t see anything to find fault with. What does Estelle wear in the meantime?”

“That is what troubles me a little; or would if I were not so selfish that I cannot remember to be troubled about anything just now; she wears mine, I suppose, and she doesn’t like it. Mine is really rather shabby; and I am truly ashamed of having taken hers without asking for it.”

“What do you propose to wear when you get home?”

“Oh, I can wear the old sack there well enough, but it was too shabby for New York. I don’t go out a great deal; you know I am the third one, and that does make a difference. I am afraid you do not like the sack after all. Don’t I look all right in it?” With a little anxious survey of herself as she noticed the shade of gravity on her uncle’s face.

“You look remarkably well, I should say. How does it happen that there is such a striking difference between her winter rig and yours?”

“Why it was her turn this winter. We have to take turn about; there are so many of us, you know, and father is sick. I don’t mind; being the youngest, of course it doesn’t make so much difference.”

“I see; but Estelle is not the oldest of you girls?”

“No,”—slowly, and with a little perplexity of tone and manner. “Fanny is the oldest; but then Estelle is”—she stopped to laugh, and went on merrily—“she is the unfortunate one, perhaps. Her clothes are always growing shabby before Fanny’s and mine. She dashes about a good deal, and is harder on her clothes. Perhaps you don’t know what a difference there is in girls in that respect, but mother realizes it, I am sure. Poor mother is kept busy day and night trying to plan for us all. I think Estelle cares more about things than Fanny does, perhaps.”

She seemed trying to explain satisfactorily to herself the evident difference which had to be made between the two elder sisters.

Her uncle followed her downstairs with the shade of gravity still on his face. He was thinking of the burdened life of his favorite sister. Somehow, he had learned more about the circumstances of the family in his few short conversations with Glyde than all his trips over the country with Estelle had evolved. Estelle had seemed to be absorbed with herself.

"She belongs to another world," he said once more, thinking of Glyde. "To the world of prayer-meetings and all the things which match."

They went out among the moving throngs on the street. They took the "L" road, which was a never failing source of pleasure to Glyde. She liked to whirl along over the tops of tall buildings and watch for the new and curious sights which such elevations afforded her. They left the car at Forty-second Street and walked briskly down several blocks, reaching at last a massive stone pile whose spire pointed heavenward. Several people were passing into the building by a side entrance, and they followed, reaching presently an audience room larger and finer than Glyde had ever seen before. The great doors seemed to be hung in air, so silently without visible help did they appear to open and close. The carpet gave back no answering sound to any footfalls; the lights which flooded the room came from hundreds

of lily bells which drooped their graceful heads for that purpose. An upright piano occupied a central position near the desk, and at the left was a handsome pipe-organ which was giving forth sounds of exquisite harmony as they moved down the aisle. The seats were perhaps half filled with men and women, chiefly women. No ushers were in attendance, and Glyde and her uncle helped themselves to seats, as seemed to be the fashion of the place. A hymn-book lay unused near them, and Glyde essayed to find the hymn which was being sung, but failed; it apparently occurred to no one to assist her. Following the hymn, the pastor called upon some one to pray; and a prayer followed remarkable to Glyde, for two things—long and involved sentences and large words; it also grew to be remarkable for its continuance.

She thought the petitioner must be deeply interested in every nation and question under the sun, for he seemed to her to omit nothing in all the wide range of human interest, save the people who were present with him in the place of prayer. Poor Glyde assured herself that it was undoubtedly a beautiful prayer; and she was deeply mortified because she could not keep her thoughts in line with it. Despite every effort to the contrary, they would go back to the groups of people she had watched that day, and to her uncle Anthony's remark concerning them. Was New York different from other places, or could the world be almost divided into two classes of people—

those who did what they ought not, and those who could not do as they would; with only a very few sprinkled in between who made life a success? This girl of nineteen wanted all lives to be successful; she not only mourned but felt a restless sense of injury in the thought that it was not so. Why had Fate arranged that such a multitude of people should be disappointed? She said "Fate" from motives of respect, and felt that she was reverent in doing so. She would not have called God in question, but that mysterious creature named Fate, she was willing to arraign. She wondered if Uncle Anthony liked to talk about such matters, and what shrewd remarks he would make concerning them; and then she brought herself back sharply to the thought of prayer, to find that it was at last concluded.

There followed what Uncle Anthony called an address from the man, who was presumably the pastor. He read a few verses from the Bible, but the address did not immediately follow the reading, and the two seemed to have no connection. He had much to say about medieval Europe, which topic it must be confessed had no interest whatever for Glyde. She was bitterly disappointed, and during the progress of the address could not keep her eyes from turning in the direction of the great clock which ticked solemnly from a conspicuous pedestal. Once she caught her uncle's eye, but it was so full of fun that she was afraid to look in his direction again, lest she might laugh.

On the whole, Glyde's first prayer-meeting in New York, could not in any sense of the word be called a success. She tried to join in her uncle's bits of merriment at her expense, but at her heart was a sore troubled feeling. She was a young Christian, and her experiences thus far had not been rose-colored. Was it strange that the watchful enemy, especially of all young creatures, contrived to smuggle in the questionings as to whether the high hopes she had indulged about this new life, when she began it, were a delusion? Did it mean a mere commonplace plodding along the road? Prayer-meetings from a sense of duty, with no joy in them; and nothing outward, anywhere, which was calculated to win others—men like her uncle, for instance? Glyde admitted to herself that "the girls" seemed to be satisfied with such a state of things. Or rather, they seemed to her, to think nothing about religious matters, save at stated times; but she had confessed to Uncle Anthony that she was not like her sisters, and she felt that in this, as in other matters, it was true.

After the prayer-meeting they went sight seeing. Uncle Antony knew just where to lead his novice to make her eyes open wide with wonder, and her whole face sparkle with delight. But he brought the shadows to it again by saying, as he kissed her good-night,

"Well, if the first part of our evening was a dismal failure, the last half was a brilliant success."

* * * * *

In the great law-office of Messrs. Peel and McMasters business was pushing, as usual. Shorthand reporters were clicking their type-writers at their utmost speed, transcribing their notes of the previous night; and the quieter but no less busy clerks who wrote with pens, were at their desks giving undivided attention to business.

The only unoccupied person in the room was a young man with alert face and keen eyes, who was evidently taking in the possibilities of the place with a view to, or hope of, the possible future. In the private office, the senior partner of the firm, and one of his confidential assistants, were in close conversation, when a knock at the door interrupted them.

“The young man has come, sir,” said the intruder hurriedly, speaking as one who knew he must save all the time possible. “You gave orders, you remember, that you were to be told when he arrived. Here is his card, and a letter of introduction from——”

“What young man?” interrupted the chief, “Oh, I remember; we telegraphed him. It was unfortunate, too, now that this unexpected matter has come up in the trial. We have no time for minor business affairs of any sort. But it cannot well be helped now, I suppose; and we are certainly in need of more help in the office. How does he appear, Mr. Albertson? Does he want to stay now, or has he only to come to survey the land? Set

him to work if you can, on approval. Tell him I will see him later, to-morrow if possible, or the next day. If he is good for anything he can work a few days on suspense. Close the door now, and don't let us be interrupted again."

Thus summarily were the young man's interests disposed of; and he had waited for months and planned for weeks with regard to this hour. As he waited now, outside, in that busy office, his heart throbbed unnaturally in alternate throes of hope and fear. It meant so much to him, this opportunity.

Mr. Albertson tip-toed back. The habit of his life was not to disturb the workers in that office. He carried on an undertone conversation with the stranger; a short one; he had learned not to waste words.

"Mr. Peel cannot see you to-day. He is very sorry. Mr. McMasters is out of town—called out unexpectedly. However that will make no difference if you want to go to work. We are in need of help, and my orders are to set you at work if you are willing. On approval, you understand. Of course we cannot say that it will last for twenty-four hours."

"Oh, I am quite ready to go to work on those terms," the stranger said quickly. "I am ready now." He looked about, apparently for a place to set down his hat, and seemed eager to commence at once. Mr. Albertson allowed himself to smile. It is true he had seen eagerness for work before, and was often skeptical as to the length of time it

would last; but something about this young man attracted him. And the eagerness lasted. All that day, and the next, the stranger wrote steadily on whatever was given him to do, Mr. Peel still continuing too busy to talk with him. A novice he was, of course, needing much direction and continual oversight, but before the first day was over Mr. Albertson knew that he approved of the young man.

“ You will have more chances for study, of course, if you remain with us,” he remarked kindly at the close of the first day. Things are more than usually rushed with us just now, on account of unexpected developments in the great lawsuit for which they are getting ready. But in ordinary times Mr. Peel will often give you a few minutes, and Mr. McMasters is very kind and helpful to students. While you are waiting for them, if there is anything I can show you about books, or in any line, just call upon me.”

This was a great deal for Mr. Albertson to say, if the stranger had but known it; it evidenced an unusual liking for him on the part of this silent man, who was yet a power in the work-room. During a moment of leisure on the following day it occurred to Mr. Albertson to question where the new man was stopping, and if he cared to look up a boarding-place, or would prefer to wait until his affairs were more settled. Upon being informed that the young man was stopping with his uncle, and could continue to do so, in the event of

a permanent engagement, Mr. Albertson liked him better than ever ; lawyers' clerks who were living in boarding-houses, among strangers, were so liable to get into scrapes. It happened that, before that second day had quite closed, Mr. Albertson had occasion to spend nearly five minutes in the same room with his chief. He watched for an opportunity when that busy man seemed to be stopping for a moment of rest, and rushed in his sentence :

“The new young man takes hold well, sir ; we haven't had a student in five years who has seemed so thoroughly in earnest. He gives his attention so fully to the business in hand that he makes few mistakes ; fewer than some who have been with us for months.”

“ Ah,—is that so ? ” came from Mr. Peel in an absent-minded tone.

“ Yes, sir ; and between times he studies with all his might. Knows how to study, too, I should say.”

“ Glad to hear it,” said Mr. Peel. “ I hope he will make a success of it. I knew his father years ago, and shall be willing to give the son a lift. But of course we must go slowly in such a matter. Don't give him any encouragement as to permanency, Albertson. Remember we can afford to have only a certain class of students about us. To-morrow, or the next day, I may be able to have a talk with him.”

“ To-morrow ” passed without the opportunity being found. It was toward the close of business

hours on the fourth day of the new student's appearance that another young man entered the office ; that young man was Ralph Bramlett.

To account for this extremely tardy arrival it will be necessary to go back to the morning on which he first heard of the opportunity and its probable loss. He expressed himself freely on the subject, and his sister Hannah, who was not given to sparing words, was equally outspoken.

“What do you suppose we could do about it? Two women here alone! If you hadn't stayed away from home all night, like a silly boy, you would have been here in time to have attended to your own business.”

This was too true to be palatable ; but it was also too true to contradict. Ralph was moody and miserable during what was left of the morning, and by afternoon, his father not having yet returned, he announced his intention of driving to a town some twelve miles distant to see to some business which would have to be attended to before long.

In vain his mother protested ; the storm was increasing in violence ; it was not the day for a long drive into the country. Ralph had a slight cold now, and this was exactly the weather calculated to increase it. She did not believe that “father” would like to have the horses exposed unnecessarily to the storm. There was no haste about that matter, it could wait another week as well as not ; and there were dozens of things to be done, which the rain need not hinder.

She might as well have spared her breath; Ralph was inexorable. He would take that twelve miles drive, and attend to that particular business on that very day.

“We have had enough of delays, already,” he said savagely; and he looked at his mother and sister as though he considered them to blame for all the annoyances which had resulted from the last one.

CHAPTER IX.

“POOR RALPH.”

HE had his way and took his twelve miles' drive; only to discover that the man he had gone to see was miles away from home in another direction. Thoroughly soaked and thoroughly miserable, he reached home somewhere near midnight and went supperless to bed, declining almost roughly the choice dishes which mother and sister pressed upon him. He could not eat a morsel, he declared; he had a headache, and wanted to be let alone. By the next morning it was apparent that he had not only headache but fever; a wretched cold kept him an unwilling and irritable prisoner for two days.

On the third, common sense began to assert itself and take him to task for not going to New York as soon as he heard of the call. How could he be sure that the opportunity was lost, even though he was a few hours behind time? The more he thought about it, the more he accused himself of folly; and finally, he resolved to go that very day and learn his fate in person.

“You can explain how it was that you were de-

tained," said his father. "That is if you have anything to explain. At least you can state that you have been ill, and that is always a reasonable excuse. I do not suppose that it will be absolutely necessary, in the cause of truth, to add that you brought the illness upon yourself. It is very unfortunate, the whole of it. If Mr. Peel is in the least like what he was as a young man he will demand promptness and frankness above all things. I don't understand the situation very well myself; I thought you had grown up, my boy."

All this was very irritating to Ralph; he was in a condition to be irritated easily. He had driven to town that afternoon and spent an hour walking about aimlessly, trying to decide whether he should call upon Marjorie after the old fashion, as if he had run in for a moment's chat as a matter of course. Before he had determined whether this was the proper thing to be done, it was settled while he was still half a block away from her door by seeing Marjorie emerge from it and walk briskly down town. He crossed the street and followed at such good speed that he overtook her just as she was entering Melborne's store.

"Good-afternoon," he said hurriedly, the importance of being in haste if he would not lose her in the vortex inside, finally settling the vexed question for him.

She turned her head, much as she might have done if a child had arrested her steps, said in her quietest, most indifferent tone, "Good-afternoon,"

and immediately disappeared among the crowds of people inside the store.

When before had Marjorie Edmonds responded thus coldly to greeting of his! His indignation returned with violence. Very well, he told himself angrily, if Marjorie Edmonds had decided to break with him merely because he did not obey her orders like a child, she was at liberty to do so. He would go away at once, to New York, and stay there, if he possibly could; forever, perhaps; at least, long enough for her to bitterly repent her treatment of him. So it was, after all, this experience which finally sent him to wait in the office of Messrs. Peel and McMasters.

“What name did you say, sir?” Mr. Albertson had asked him, moving a step nearer with a look of surprise and bewilderment on his face. Now Ralph was still in the mood which had been evolved by all the exasperating occurrences of the past few days, and could not be expected to be courteous to one whom he regarded as a mere clerk.

“Bramlett,” he said irritably, and in a louder tone than was generally used in the office. “It is a sufficiently uncommon name to be remembered, I should think.”

“And you are expected, do you say?”

“Certainly I am; I have had letters from Mr. Peel, and finally a telegram.” He omitted to state how many days had elapsed since the telegram reached him. Mr. Albertson’s step was slower than usual, and there was a look of undoubted

mystification on his face as he made his way toward the private office, and waited for admittance.

"There is a young man, sir," he said hesitatingly, when he finally had permission to speak, and then he told Ralph's story.

"What is all this?" asked Mr. Peel, who had been writing during his clerk's opening sentences; he held his pen in the air now, and whirled about on his chair for a full view of the speaker's face; "*I* have written him, does he say? and *telegraphed* him! When, pray? What does it all mean? What do you say his name is?"

"That is the strange part of it: he says his name is Bramlett."

"Bramlett! Why I thought that young man had been at work in our office for four or five days and was giving satisfaction. Isn't that his name?"

"I certainly understood so from you. He sent in his card if you remember. I did not so much as glance at it; nor did you. But you told me he was the young man you expected; and I knew that that young man's name was Bramlett. You ordered me to set him to work."

"And did he say he had a telegram from me?"

"No, sir; he said nothing to me about telegrams; it was you who told me you had telegraphed him."

"And on the strength of that you set him to work without identifying him even by name! I'm afraid you would not succeed as a lawyer, Mr. Albertson. I supposed of course it was Bramlett;

I was not expecting anybody else; but it seems we both jumped at conclusions. Well, unravel the mystery in any way you think best. Are they twins, do you suppose?"

"No, sir; I shouldn't say that they were; they look and act very unlike."

"And you like the first one and don't the second; that is plain. I'm afraid you would make a prejudiced jurymen, Mr. Albertson. Report whatever results you reach to me; I haven't time for details."

The great man turned again in his chair, as the sentence was completed, and before the door closed he was writing again. Mr. Albertson went back toward the public office more annoyed than he often allowed himself to become. He had certainly taken to the new clerk in a way that was unusual for him. If he should now discover that it was all a mistake, and that this intruder was to have the choice position which had been long watched for by more than one, the gray-haired clerk's heart would be sad. He preferred the Mr. Bramlett who was now in possession. Even his chiefs rarely spoke to him in the tone that the intruding Bramlett had used that morning.

Instead of returning at once to the main room, he turned aside to a small, semi-private office, and summoning a call-boy directed that the young man who sat at desk No. 2 be sent to him.

"Am I mistaken," he said, "in supposing your name to be Bramlett?"

Yes, he was. The new clerk's name was Burwell; Paul Burwell.

“And did you receive a telegram from Mr. Peel the evening before you called here?”

Oh no, indeed; he had never heard from Mr. Peel by letter or telegram. An old friend of his mother's, Judge Marshall of Kenicut, had learned incidentally that there was a possible opening in this office, and knowing his extreme anxiety to secure such an opportunity had offered him a letter of introduction to Mr. Peel, which Mr. Burwell had delivered to the clerk on the morning of his arrival, and had been promptly set at work temporarily in the office. He did not state how great had been his surprise and delight at this immediate result. Matters began to look very serious so far as this faithful worker's prospects were concerned; evidently the intruder was the expected Mr. Bramlett who had received letters and telegrams. Mr. Albertson was intensely mortified. It was the first time, in all the fourteen years of his service with the firm, that he could be called to account for carelessness. There was nothing for it but to repair to his chief with the information which he had gained. The unexpected result was that Mr. Peel threw down his pen and summoned Ralph Bramlett to an immediate interview, during which that young man was subjected to a running fire of cross-questions. “Where was he when the telegram arrived?” “What hindered him from mak-

ing an immediate reply either in person or by wire?" "Was he too ill to telegraph?"

Poor Ralph, unused to such close questioning, and with a foolish feeling at his heart that he had something to conceal, blundered and stammered and contradicted himself about "headache," and "fever," and "thunder storms" and an "all-night absence," until Mr. Peel regarded him with suspicious eyes and wondered how much of the story was fact, and how much he was composing for the occasion. He was left in the private office to consider the matter, while Mr. Peel himself strode into the large room to confer with the incumbent of desk No. 2, an experience so unusual as to startle all the clerks in the office.

The final result was as poor Ralph might have known. A young man three or four days behind time, with such a confused and contradictory account of himself to give, could hardly expect consideration at the hands of such business men as Messrs. Peel and McMasters.

Mr. Peel recounted as much of the interview as was necessary to his partner afterwards, and laughed in an annoyed way as he said:

"So it has come to pass that we, who are supposed to be exasperatingly particular in regard to those who come into our office as students, and who have at least a dozen estimable young men always watching for our vacancies, have established a perfect stranger, who was not even heard of until the morning when he presented himself and was set

to work! Fate must have had a hand in that affair."

"Perhaps the young man had a hand in making his own fate," observed the partner. "More 'fate' is made by promptness and faithful attention to business than young people dream of. Where has this other young fellow been during the days which intervened between the telegram and his appearance?"

"*He doesn't know!*" said Mr. Peel, laughing; "he is the most confused person you ever heard of; unless I am more confused than he by his story. There was a storm, and a ride at night, and a headache, and a bad cold and he was sick in bed at the same time that he was taking the drive, I think! Anyhow, matters are hopelessly confused in both our minds. Albertson takes to the other one; and there is no known reason for displacing him, when we offered him the place on approval. He has given entire satisfaction, so far; besides, I have looked up his letter of introduction, and it expresses a great deal in a short space, and comes from a high source. Oh, he is probably the one; we'll try him anyway. I should like to have gratified my old acquaintance, Bramlett; but he couldn't expect business men to wait four days. Now, Mr. McMasters, I am ready for business, if you are."

When Ralph Bramlett walked slowly away from the office that morning, he had a bitter sense of his own folly. How long he had waited for this

golden opportunity! An assured position in the office of Peel and McMaster was almost as good as being a lawyer one's self; it opened the way, as no other office did, for steady advancement and final success. And he had felt so sure of the position so soon as it opened! Mr. Peel's letters had been most kind; he had remembered his father pleasantly; he had promised his personal attention to the matter, and had given it. And he, Ralph, had thrown it away for the sake of avoiding the passing sarcasms of Estelle Douglass! He hated her when he thought of it. Even after that he need not have been a fool. Why had he not taken the first train for New York that next morning and explained in a manly way that he had been absent from home, and came by the first train after receiving his call? Then he would have been in time.

He knew that he had not done so, simply because he had given way to a feeling of being ill-used; to a notion that fate was against him, and that there was no use in his trying to be anybody but a plodding farmer; which was his way of referring to that manly employment, when he was in the depths. Nay, even after all the delays, why had he told such a confused, school-boy story to the great lawyer? What did he care about storms and picnics and colds? Had he simply said that he had been absent from home when the telegram arrived, and later, had been too ill to give attention to business, he would at least have preserved his self-respect. On the whole, the young man had a

wholesome feeling of self-dissatisfaction ; he was even willing, for the moment, to admit that he had been to blame for all his trials ; that Marjorie Edmonds was justified in feeling hurt and offended.

He walked the length of an entire block considering the matter in this light. He felt an almost irresistible desire to have Marjorie's sympathy at that moment. He felt quite certain that she would have sympathy to give. If he could call upon her now, within the next hour and say, first : " Marjorie, I want to tell you that I acted like an idiot and a bear the other night. I don't know what possessed me ; or—that is not true, I do ; I wanted to save you and myself from the merciless ridicule of Estelle Douglass and so allowed her to persuade me against my better judgment. I want you to forgive me ; if I had known how much your heart was set upon being at home that night, I would not have disappointed you for a thousand Douglass girls."

And then, " Oh, Marjorie, I have failed in the desire of my heart. For three years I have been hoping to get in at the great law firm of Peel and McMasters, and only that night, that fateful night, they telegraphed me and I was not there to receive it, and I have lost my opportunity." How certain he was that she would speak gentle, encouraging words, such as no other could. " Never mind, Ralph," he could seem to hear her voice,—“ you know of course that I am sorry ; ever so sorry,

but there will be another opportunity soon. Messrs. Peel and McMasters are not the only lawyers in the world, and even they may have an unexpected vacancy very soon; don't give up heart, make up your mind that you *will have* the place you believe you are fitted for, and then watch for it." Some such words as those, he would be certain to hear from her lips. He longed for them; he believed he would go home and carry out his part of the programme so as to ensure hers. He took out his time-table and studied it. In two hours there would be a return train. Should he take it? He had met Estelle Douglass in the street the evening before and told her he was going to New York to spend the winter. If he returned the very next day how strange it would look to her. How many absurd things she could say because of it. His face flushed over the thought of her ridicule. Why had he told her he was going to spend the winter! Still, he need not rush home like a homesick child. Why not stay and see a little of the city, now that he was here? No, he must get home; he could ill afford the money that it would cost to stay. He would wait simply for the midnight train. That would bring him home in the morning in time for the day's duties. The next question was, how should he spend the intervening time. There was sight-seeing enough for the hours of daylight, but there was the evening.

When evening had fully come, he was still con-

sidering the question while he walked the street. He passed a large, plain building which did not look like a church; but they were singing; inside, a hymn which Marjorie sang once, in the choir at home. He paused and was on the eve of entering the door; he wanted to hear more of that hymn. But he turned on his heel with a half-contemptuous smile. What an idea, to spend the only evening he had for New York in a prayer-meeting! How would that sound, repeated? He went instead, to a theatre. The play was neither of the best nor the worst; perhaps the utmost that could have been briefly said of it was that it was weak. The hero was an ill-used man, a victim of "fate" which pursued him relentlessly even to the bitter end. Ralph Bramlett followed him breathlessly to that end; then came away moody and miserable. He listened in vain for the sound of Marjorie's voice in encouragement; something had hushed it. He told himself once more, that there was no use in his trying.

In that wretched young man who tried and failed, he saw himself; fate was against him; even Marjorie, his friend from childhood, had turned coldly away, offended over a trifle. She might *stay* offended then; he should not apologize. What was there for him to apologize about? It was she who had given them a wretched fright and put everything awry for the next day. Poor Ralph! The being he called Fate had gotten possession of him again.

CHAPTER X.

A MARKED DAY.

YEARS afterwards, whenever Glyde Douglass wanted to refer to an especially happy period in her life, she was sure to go back to New York and spend over again those days with Uncle Anthony. Especially to that lovely Friday which followed the attempt to find a prayer-meeting. Uncle Anthony gave up almost the entire day to his niece. In the morning they went shopping. The conversation which was held just before they started, is, perhaps, worthy of record. Glyde had confided to her uncle the existence of the two-dollar bill and the important part which it was to play in her affairs.

He was the most sympathetic of confidantes. "All right," he said, his gray eyes twinkling with pleasure, "we'll attend to that the first thing. What have you thought of?"

"Oh, nothing," Glyde explained. "Or rather, a hundred things. Still, I think I have very nearly settled upon some of them. I must have something silk for mother; I suppose it will have to be a handkerchief."

“Does she particularly dote on silk handkerchiefs ?

“I don't think she has any. I mean a soft white one that she can knot up and wear at her throat when she is dressed. You don't know how it could be done, Uncle Anthony, but I do ; she would look pretty in it. And for father, I think I shall get some new neckties ; I know the kind he likes, and I heard mother tell him that his were getting shabby. I think I can get two ; but perhaps not. I don't suppose you know what those neat little black ones cost, do you ? They are not in the least like the ones you wear ? ”

“That means, I suppose, that mine are not neat ! Never mind, I can stand it. No, I don't know what they cost, but there is probably somebody in town who does. Go on ; what next ? ”

“Why, the girls are the hardest ; not because there are so few things to get them, but so many. Yesterday when we were going down town we passed a jewelry store ; it looked large and handsome, the windows were brilliantly lighted ; and there were some tiny pins displayed ; wee bits of pins, clover leaves, you know, and violets, and mignonette. They were marked only thirty-five cents. Could they possibly have been good for anything at that price ? ”

“Good for bits of glass and bright-colored paper,” said Uncle Anthony. Glyde laughed cheerfully.

“I was afraid, so ” she said. “Then I am un-

decided in regard to the girls. I thought if thirty-five cents could buy anything of that sort which Estelle and Fanny could wear, I should like to get them, for it happens that both of them have broken their pins."

"Oh, well," said Uncle Anthony, "we might look them up and see; perhaps they would do for everyday wear. Seems to me you are very modest in your wishes; silk handkerchiefs and even *neat* neckties are small affairs to represent your first visit to New York, are they not?"

"Well, but I have to be modest," laughed Glyde. "Didn't I tell you what my resources were?"

"I see; but give free rein to your imagination, can't you, for the fun of the thing? Suppose you had,—well, for purposes of illustration, we will say a hundred dollars to spend this morning? I'll venture a neat necktie that you would waste the entire morning tossing over things and wouldn't have the least idea how to spend them."

"Wouldn't I?" with a little emphatic nod of her head which was very becoming to Glyde. "I'd know just exactly how to spend them. I've spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars in that way, Uncle Anthony, and I'm thoroughly posted."

"All right; go ahead; let me hear you think aloud. I never saw a girl who could spend a hundred dollars quickly and sensibly. What would you get for that mother of yours, for instance, besides the silk handkerchief?"

“ I should get her a silk dress ; a beautiful black silk dress ; just such an one as she ought to wear to church and everywhere. I don't suppose you half understand mothers, Uncle Anthony, yours died when you were such a little boy ; but you see they have a way of giving everything up to their daughters, and sons too, I suppose, and going without, themselves. When I was a little girl, mother used to have a black silk dress which she wore to church almost every Sunday ; I can remember drawing my hand over it to feel how soft it was ; and I know just how mother looked in it. But she hasn't worn a silk dress for,—it must be five years ; she cut that one over for Estelle that time when she went to Syracuse with you, you remember, and she has never had another. You see there are so many grown-up daughters that she cannot do things for herself, at least she thinks she cannot. As for father, I should buy a great big splendid overcoat for him, just as warm and comfortable as could be ; he wears a rather shabby one now ; and it is not warm enough for the coldest weather, either ; but when we talk to him about it he shakes his head and says it will do nicely for him. Then for the girls, since it is something which will last forever, I should get real ‘ truly ’ pins, costing as much as five or six dollars. There ! Haven't I spent almost my hundred dollars ? ”

But at this tremendous estimate for a “ truly ” pin, Uncle Anthony had thrown back his head and

laughed so long and loud that it was some moments before he could answer her.

"You have done very well," he said at last, "remarkably well for a girl; especially about the expensive pins. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Well, but," she said with a pretty pretense of indignation that was if possible more fascinating than her merriment. "What would you have me do? I could not spend it all on pins, could I, and have nothing left for the dress and overcoat?"

"That is the way they do it three-fourths of the time, my dear, I verily believe," said Uncle Anthony, sobering at once, and regarding his niece with an air of peculiar tenderness. In truth, his laughter had been very near to tears. This innocent little girl who had fallen so unsuspectingly into his trap, had revealed much more than she realized. The fact presented itself to him for the first time, that his favorite, and indeed only surviving sister, was straitened even in her wardrobe. And his pale-faced brother-in-law who had for years been carrying on a hand-to-hand struggle with feebleness, wore a shabby overcoat which was not heavy enough for him. While he, Anthony Ward, without wife or child, or any one dependent upon him, was receiving a fine salary and tossing it about carelessly without regard to the comfort of even his very own. And here was this unselfish girl with only two dollars of her own in the world, planning to spend every cent of it in little useful things for her loved ones, conscious

all the while of greater needs which she could not supply.

They went out very soon after this; making their way with all speed down town, and plunging presently into the wonders and delight of Denning's store.

Here, for the moment, Glyde lost her head entirely over the glories displayed, and Uncle Anthony smiled to himself as he thought he saw the soft white silk handkerchief lose its important place in her memory. He need not have feared; in a very few minutes she pulled herself up sharply and said with the gravity of one who had responsible matters on her shoulders,

"Uncle Anthony, take me to the handkerchief department, please; I must not spend time over these lovely things until my work is done."

He obeyed in subdued silence; and, with the utmost care, the handkerchief was chosen from a great multitude. The particular maiden must have it just so fine, and of just such a delicate tint of creamy white, with just such a hemstitch and no other. Before the purchase was completed, the patient saleswoman and the patient waiter realized that the shopper knew just what she wanted. Then Uncle Anthony electrified them both by gravely asking to be shown some black silk which would match the handkerchief.

"You mean black silk handkerchiefs?" said the bewildered clerk.

"Handkerchiefs! No, indeed! I mean black

silk dresses, or the stuff to make them of; such as ladies wear. I have a fancy for seeing how a white handkerchief looks on a black silk dress."

With a strange mixture of bewilderment, dismay, and delight setting all her pulses to throbbing, Glyde followed her uncle through the intricacies of one department after another until the silk "room" was reached. Here, he suddenly developed into the keen critical man of business, examining textures and shades with the air of an expert, and asking questions which betrayed such a surprising knowledge of grades and styles as to fill the mind of his niece with awe, and the clerk with respect. He ignored Glyde's timid hints that that silk was very expensive, and the other was very heavy, and tossed the precious fabrics about with careless hand. At last came the important question: "How much does it take to make a dress for a woman of medium size?" The clerk suggested sixteen yards.

"Then give me twenty, of this kind," he said, promptly, selecting the finest piece on the counter.

Glyde fairly held her breath while the rich breadths were being counted off. Once she began a timid protest.

"Uncle Anthony, can you possibly be buying that for mother? I never even dreamed of such a thing; and mother would be so mortified if she thought that I——" he interrupted her.

"See here; I gave careful and silent attention to your shopping; now you just hold on until I

get through with mine. She was my sister long before she was your mother, remember; and if I have a fancy to see how a black silk dress looks under a white silk handkerchief, what is that to you? Give me all the belongings that go with such a dress; buttons and braid, and lining, and everything you can think of." This last, to the amused saleswoman who hastened to do his bidding. Never was silk dress better supplied with "belongings" than was that.

From the silk department Uncle Anthony asked in a low tone to be shown to the room where they kept "sacks for young ladies like this one;" with a nod of his head toward Glyde. The appreciative attendant returned the nod, and led the way swiftly, Glyde following her uncle in a state of mind more easily imagined than described. In vain she exclaimed and protested, when she found to what he had brought her. Uncle Anthony had taken matters entirely into his own hands and would have his way.

"That sack is all very well for Estelle," he assured her, "and I don't deny that it is rather becoming to you; but you might as well have one of your own, and I have a fancy for a kind they used to wear, which I see has come back again. Try this one on, little girl, and let me see how it strikes me."

It was one of the newest styles, fine and heavy, and beautifully trimmed, yet simple enough for a girl of the most refined tastes. The quick eye of

the saleswoman had caught the right size, and the garment fitted as though made to order.

"It suits me exactly," Uncle Anthony announced, in his most complacent tone. "Your Aunt Estelle used to wear one very much like it. Go over to the mirror, little girl, and see what you think. If it pleases you as much as it does me, we will call it a bargain."

No girl could have looked at herself in a full length mirror and caught such a reflection as Glyde did, without being pleased. Her face spoke for her."

"You like it?" said Uncle Anthony. "Glad of it. You may as well keep it on and have the other sent home. It is warmer than that; and this is a pretty cold morning."

"But, Uncle Anthony," she said, moving toward him and speaking low. Her appalled eyes had caught sight of the figure marked on the sleeve-card, and she did not know how to make her protest strong enough. "I truly do not need it; my sack which I have at home is warm; warmer than Estelle's, and I do not mind its being a little old-fashioned; and indeed I cannot think that you know how very expensive this one is."

"Yes, I do; I know exactly what it costs. You don't suppose I am foolish enough to buy an article without finding that out the first thing, do you? I call it very reasonable for a garment gotten up in that style; it is well lined, you see, and will outlast three or four like that one you had on.

The question is does it suit you as well as anything you see around here?"

"Oh, it could not be lovelier, but——"

"Then we won't waste time over conjunctions, disjunctive ones at that. Just let the young lady wear it home, will you? And send the other to my hotel with the handkerchief, you know, and other things?"

The sympathetic saleswoman laughed; she had not had such an enjoyable customer in many a day. Her heart was in the entire enterprise. She led the way for Uncle Anthony with such promptness and success that several more bewildering purchases were made by him before he announced himself ready for luncheon. Uncle Anthony's lunches, which he managed entirely, were little studies in art for his companion. On this particular day, the oysters he ordered were served in a little silver-covered dish, and the coffee in a tiny silver coffee-pot. As he served his companion to oysters, and beamed on her while she poured him a cup of coffee and carefully sugared and creamed it to his liking, he said: "This is something like. A little table to ourselves, and somebody to look after me. I'll tell you what, Glyde, I think I'll steal you and carry you home to keep house for me. How should you like that? The only trouble is, I don't stay at home three weeks at a time; and what would become of my bird in her cage while I was scurrying around the country? What will you have, Glyde, for a finish? Cream,

or what? We must be somewhat expeditious; it is later than I supposed, and there is a good deal of business to be done yet."

Glyde assured him that she had thought everything, "and more too," was already done; but before the day had fairly closed, she saw how mistaken she had been. The neckties were duly attended to, and then Uncle Anthony seated her in a chair in a large clothing store and went off on his own account. He knew about overcoats, and needed none of her assistance or protests; but he laughed softly while he tumbled them over and examined and criticised and finally selected, at the thought of the mixture of delight and dismay with which the "little girl" would examine this trophy when he displayed it in her room that evening. He took care that it should be heavy enough and of a material which would last for several winters, at least. But no word concerning the purchase was hinted when he returned to Glyde to know if she was rested and ready for more shopping. Then he dazzled her completely by the display of glories in a certain jewelry store on Broadway. It was by no means the one in which she had seen the thirty-five cent pins, and she exclaimed in almost terror over the marks attached to those in the show window; and to her uncle's suggestion that she might as well have a look at some real things, while she had the opportunity, replied that it seemed almost wicked even to look at such extravagance.

“It does, really,” she said in great earnestness, as he bent over the case with her and followed her eyes. “Look at that blazing circle of diamonds marked two thousand dollars. Think of wearing as much money as that to fasten one’s collar! I am honest in saying I think it is wicked. If I were—oh *ever* so rich I am sure I shouldn’t do it. At least I mean I hope I shouldn’t, for mustn’t it be wicked when the world is so full of people who actually haven’t bread enough?”

“Don’t torture me with any ethics of that kind to-day, little girl,” her uncle said good-humorously, “I am not in the mood for them. I’m not going to buy any two-thousand-dollar diamonds, though; you need not be troubled; but it will do no harm to admire them. Come to this side, and see if you find anything which pleases your taste and your morals better.”

The case on the other side gleamed with beauty; and Glyde studied it, and exclaimed, and enjoyed, to her uncle’s entire satisfaction. They did not seem so “wicked,” she assured him. There, for instance, was a “perfectly lovely” pin marked fifteen dollars; to be sure she should not think of buying it, not if she had the money in her hand, any more than she should the two-thousand-dollar one; but then, being the real thing, she supposed they could not make it any cheaper than that; and she could imagine herself, if she had a *great deal* of money, spending so much for a pin and thinking it right; because it

was something which would always last. Then she asked, somewhat timidly, if her uncle supposed it possible in such an elegant place that there could be any real cheap pins which were worth buying; like those she had told him about, in the window.

“Wait a little,” he said. “No, I don’t think there are any of that kind here; but we can go elsewhere, after we have had our enjoyment out of these. I like that twelve-dollar one at the left; that one with a pearl in the centre, don’t you?” They discussed and argued over the different styles, and agreed and disagreed a dozen times as to shapes and degrees of beauty, and enjoyed themselves as only a girl can who is in love with the beautiful, and has had little chance to enjoy it, and a man who is lonely and is getting his pleasure entirely out of her enjoyment. When at last Glyde obliged herself to draw back from the case and say: “Uncle Anthony, I am keeping you dreadfully, am I not? I forgot that we ought to hurry,” he closed the scene suddenly and struck her dumb with amazement and confusion, by ordering two of the twelve-dollar pins which she had insisted were the prettier, and also the identical fifteen-dollar one which she had first noticed, and to which her affections had steadily clung.

“Oh dear!” she said almost with a sob, as they emerged at last from the place of enchant-

ment, "Uncle Anthony, I *don't* know what to say to you."

"Say it is cold;" said her uncle, briskly, "and that we must hurry home to dinner. We have got to hunt up another prayer meeting to-night."

CHAPTER XI.

REAPING THORNS.

MARJORIE EDMONDS was in her room alone. It was late and the house was still. The door which communicated with her mother's room, and which generally stood wide open, was closed.

"I will open it, mother," Marjorie had said, "when I am ready for bed. I want to write in my diary first, and do a few little things, and I'm afraid of disturbing you." And then she had kissed her good-night with a smile.

But the mother had sighed, after the door was closed. She knew that Marjorie had other things to think about besides her diary. She knew that her heart was ill at ease; and the mother felt so little in sympathy with the struggle which was going on, that she must keep away from it.

It was three weeks since that eventful nutting-party had gone merrily on its way without a thought of the day being seriously connected with the future of any of its members. Yet Marjorie had known few happy moments since that day. Indifferent as she had appeared to Ralph Bramlett, if that young man had been ever so slight a student of human nature, he would have seen

that her very indifference was an indication of strong feeling. Indignation might be natural and pardonable under the circumstances, but Marjorie Edmonds was not the girl to put away thus suddenly the playmate of her childhood and the companion and confidant of her girlhood, without keen pain. There had been no deliberate intention of putting him away. There had been at first only strong indignation. He deserved the fright she gave him; he deserved the coldness with which she had greeted him that afternoon. "What young woman who respected herself could do less than that?" she had asked herself as she closed the store-door and made her way through the crowds of Christmas shoppers, thinking, not of the purchases she had come to make, but of the young man outside. Yet even then she felt, rather than planned, that this sort of thing should not last. Ralph would call to see her, of course; probably that afternoon, on his way home, or certainly in the evening.

Then they would talk matters over. He would explain to her why he had been so hateful the other day,—and now she more than half surmised the reason. "He did not want me to be annoyed by Estelle's absurdities," said this forgiving heart. He would make it all plain to her and ask her to forgive him; and then, after he had humiliated himself quite as much as he should, she would softly admit that her part of the performance had been rash and cruel; that she was sorry for the

fright she gave him. Then she would tell him how frightened she was, and how she had thought at the time that if he were only walking beside her she would not be afraid of anything. Why, it would all be made up between them, of course; how absurd in friends of their standing to quarrel over a trifle! For even at that early day Marjorie began to try to call Ralph's treatment of her a trifle. If he had called that evening she would have been almost ready for him. But he did not; he went to New York. When Marjorie heard that, she was startled. Ralph must be very much hurt indeed to go out of town without seeing her. If she had known that he was going away, perhaps she would not have responded so coldly to his good-afternoon. She heard also that he had been ill, which accounted, she believed, for his not coming at once to see her. She thought much about him during the next two days. Had Ralph taken that midnight train from New York as he at first planned, and called upon her the next evening, she would have been quite ready for him, and all the soothing words he had imagined as flowing from her lips, would doubtless have been heard. But he did not come; and she heard, through Estelle Douglass, that he had gone to New York for the winter! And he did not write! Two weeks went by, and then suddenly, one morning, Ralph passed the house on the opposite side of the street; he was talking with Estelle Douglass, and as they walked slowly by, neither of them raised

their eyes to her window. Then Marjorie began to grow indignant over again. If Ralph meant to cast her off in this way because she chose not to leave her mother all night, after he had failed her, then he might; she was willing. She drew herself up proudly, and looked after the slow walkers with dry eyes and glowing cheeks. But this mood did not last; she was sure Ralph must misunderstand. He could not know how she had longed to get home, and how she had suffered in coming. Perhaps he knew nothing about it; perhaps he imagined that Mr. Maxwell had called for her by appointment, and taken her home.

"People will imagine anything," said poor Marjorie, "when they are excited."

By degrees it almost began to seem to her that Ralph was the injured one, and that she ought to speak some word which would reach his ears.

Meantime, the mother looked on, and was sometimes sympathetic, and sometimes indignant, and all the time miserable. It has doubtless been discovered before this, that Ralph Bramlett was not Mrs. Edmonds's choice for her daughter. In truth, the daughter by no means made it manifest that he was her own choice; but the mother, looking on, feared exceedingly, yet was afraid to speak, lest that which she feared would be precipitated thereby. "They are only boy-and-girl friends," she told herself encouragingly at times; but at other times she realized that boys and girls grow to be men and women. At least two years

before this time, she had felt sure that her daughter had outgrown Ralph Bramlett; but the daughter had not discovered it. What if she should never discover it! Then the mother wondered if Ralph Bramlett could not be made to grow, even to overtake her daughter. To this end she had set herself to work to try to bring all wise influences to bear upon him; but Ralph, although it may be hoped that he did not know it, was skillful in putting aside wise influences. When the nutting party came, and the break which grew out of it, this mother secretly rejoiced. When Ralph went to New York without word or sign, she was of course indignant with him for her daughter's sake, but secretly glad, also, for her sake. If only he would stay away and write no letters, in the course of time her daughter's self-respect would assert itself, and she would realize that she had been tossed aside in a pet. But now he had returned, and had been at home for a week, and some astounding things had occurred. For the first day or two following the young man's return, Marjorie had been nervous to a degree that no one had ever observed in her before. She had started and grown pale at every sound of the door-bell, and had been at all times on the alert for something to happen. Something happened, but it was not what she had expected. Does what we are expecting ever happen? Ralph Bramlett did not call, but Estelle Douglass did.

“Of course you know the latest item of news?”

she said. "Indeed, I suppose you knew it long before we did. And of course you approve, or it never would have been done; but I confess I was astonished when I heard it."

"That is very interesting," laughed Marjorie, "or would be if I had an idea what you were talking about. I cannot recall any item of news."

"Oh, my dear little Marjorie! you mustn't tell fibs; and you a descendant of the Puritans! Such an unnecessary fib, too! Do you expect me to imagine for a moment that Ralph Bramlett transacts important business without your knowledge?"

Now the form in which Marjorie Edmonds's pride was besetting her at this time was that she could not endure the thought of having Estelle Douglass know that she did not understand Ralph's affairs as thoroughly as usual; so to this sentence no other reply could be made than a half laughing, non-committal one. Estelle pressed the point.

"Tell me honestly, Marjorie, were you not surprised and a good deal disappointed when he told you about it? I said you would never consent to it, and that I did not believe Ralph would go contrary to your wishes. Of course it is a wholesale business, and all that, and Ralph is only the bookkeeper. He will have no more to do with selling the stuff than we shall, but still——"

This was growing alarming. Mrs. Edmonds in the next room caught, through the open doorway, a

glimpse of Marjorie's paling face, and came to the rescue.

"Are you talking of Ralph's latest business venture?" she asked, appearing at the door and speaking as calmly as though she had known for weeks all that there was to know concerning it.

"Yes," said Estelle turning eagerly to a new medium for her coveted information. "What did you say to it, Mrs. Edmonds? Mother and I said that Mrs. Edmonds would be shocked; that young people might comfort themselves with the thought that a bookkeeper in a distillery had nothing to do with the liquor business, but that women of Mrs. Edmonds's stamp would not take it so calmly,

"You are right," said Mrs. Edmonds in her quietest tone, "I do not approve of it at all."

"Mother!" began Marjorie, turning glowing cheeks toward her, "do you think——" then she stopped. What she began to say was: "Do you think that we need to discuss Ralph Bramlett's affairs with outsiders?" but the manifest rudeness of such a sentence both to her mother and their guest arrested her lips in time. Instead, she said: "Do you think I ought to try to get that letter off by this mail?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Edmonds. "It will save twenty-four hours if you do. Estelle will excuse you for a few minutes." And Marjorie ran away.

The letter was one which could have waited, but the mother felt that her daughter could not endure more, just then; and it was undoubtedly

true that twenty-four hours could be saved by mailing it now; so she spoke only truth. When the door closed after Marjorie, she turned quietly to Estelle.

"This is a very sudden movement upon Ralph's part." The tone was ambiguous. It might have a slight rising inflection; but it was *not* intended to inform the guest that Mrs. Edmonds knew nothing about the matter and was seeking information.

"I suppose so," said Estelle. "I did not know how long he had been planning it. I heard of it only yesterday. I must say I was surprised, and yet in a sense I wasn't. He was so dreadfully disappointed about that New York affair, you know; and he hates farming. Then, too, I suppose it is quite necessary that he get to work in some way. The Bramlett farm is all run down, people say. This will be only temporary, of course; but it is a great temptation to a young man. He will have a very good salary."

It was a settled thing then. At least Estelle Douglass thought so. Mrs. Edmonds had continued in her very quiet way to get, without appearing to, what information she could without giving any. When Marjorie returned, the letter having been posted, she was as quiet and uninteresting as her mother.

"They take it very differently from what I supposed they would," Estelle reported at home. "Even Mrs. Edmonds, it seems, is willing to have

him get fifteen hundred a year in these hard times. But they have been such fanatical temperance people always that I must say it astonished me. Oh, Mrs. Edmonds said she did not approve of it, but Marjorie colored up and looked annoyed at her for even that, though she said it quietly enough." And this was all that Estelle had learned.

In the Edmonds home utmost quiet reigned after the caller's departure. Marjorie had her sewing, and she sewed steadily and silently for some minutes; then she said timidly: "Mother, why don't you say something?"

Mrs. Edmonds turned from her cutting-table and smiled tenderly on her daughter.

"What should I say, little girl?"

"You do not believe that absurd report about Ralph, I suppose?"

"I am afraid it is too true, dear. Estelle was not only thoroughly posted, but seemed to think that we were also. She says he is regularly engaged as bookkeeper, on a salary of fifteen hundred dollars."

"But, mother, it is too absurd! Ralph a bookkeeper in a distillery. He is a temperance man."

Mrs. Edmonds' lip curled a very little; she could not help it; she turned quickly back to her table to hide the curl. She wanted to say: "He is not a man at all; he is only a grown-up boy with *feelings*, instead of convictions, and he can therefore be swayed by the passing moment in any

way that the current happens to be the strongest. But she forbore, and took refuge again in silence.

“Mother,” burst forth Marjorie again, “I think it is dreadful in you to listen to that girl’s gossip about Ralph. If he has made her believe that he is about to do some desperate thing like that, he has been driven to it by disappointments and annoyances. But I do not believe she has any foundation for her story. You do not know Estelle so well as I do. To put it mildly, she is very careless with her statements; jumps at conclusions, and reports, as facts, statements which are made sometimes in mere sport. Ralph has perhaps gotten off some nonsense to her, which with her usual haste she has made into a story, and rushed to tell. I think I shall write a note to him, mother, and tell him what an absurd report is being circulated.”

Then was Mrs. Edmonds dismayed. A note to Ralph, written in the style in which Marjorie could write it, would be likely she felt to put matters on the old footing between them; and from this her heart shrank with ever increasing pain.

“I thought, daughter,” she said, trying to keep her voice from expressing either pain or annoyance, “that Ralph’s treatment of you had been such as to make note-writing to him out of the question, at least until he apologized.”

But the daughter had made a movement of impatience as she replied: “Oh, mother! I don’t feel about that quite as I did. I begin to under-

stand it better. Ralph probably wanted to shield both himself and me from Estelle's witty and disagreeable tongue. I am sure after my experience this morning with her, I ought to be able to sympathize with him. In any case it does not seem to be just the right thing to let such a matter make trouble between friends of a life-time. It wouldn't be a very Christian-like way to manage, would it?"

When Marjorie said that, she felt that it ought to close her mother's mouth. She made no pretensions to being a Christian herself, but surely her mother ought to be glad when she tried to govern her life by such principles. And Mrs. Edmonds, not in the least convinced, felt, nevertheless, that once more the time had come for silence. Marjorie wrote the note, and brought it to her mother to read.

"Dear Ralph," it commenced, but that of course, was nothing; notes with more or less frequency had passed between these two ever since they had learned to write, and they had always been "Dear Ralph" and "Dear Marjorie." The mother believed that if they were children again she would order her daughter's course differently. Was she beginning to reap what she had sown?

But the note was simple enough. Marjorie ignored any trouble between them. "I am writing a line in haste," she said, "to tell you of a ridiculous rumor which I heard but this morning, to the effect that you are going into the liquor business!

or into a clerkship with liquor dealers, which is much the same thing. Of course I do not credit it, but thought I would give you a friendly hint of what tongues are busy about. I suppose you have been very busy since your return, but is it not nearly time for you to remember that you have friends living on Maple Avenue?"

A very simple note, but the mother was bitterly disappointed in it. What more could a young man desire? Surely she must protest, even though she precipitated what she most feared. Her duty ought to be done.

"Daughter," she began, hesitating and trying to choose her words with utmost care, "are you not afraid that a young man like Ralph Bramlett will take advantage of such a note as that, under the circumstances?"

Marjorie opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"I do not understand," she said. "What advantage could he take? It is like dozens of notes that I have written him before."

"I know, and for that very reason is encouraging. You and Ralph cannot remain children; you have grown up; and he is of the age when one looks for at least a dawning of manhood. In a heedless boy many things can be overlooked which in a young man are almost unpardonably rude. Ralph was certainly very rude to you, and you felt it keenly; yet you have written to him as though nothing had happened, and he was at

liberty to be on the old footing, without a word of apology."

Again that movement of impatience, and the daughter spoke in a tone which her mother did not often hear.

"Mother how *can* you be so hard upon Ralph! when you have known and cared for him ever since he was a little boy? He does not think of me as a young lady with whom he must be ceremonious. I was foolish to make so much of what was so small an affair. When one comes to consider it, how could he do as I wished, without regard to the others? I suppose if the truth were known, I am the one who ought to apologize, for he must have been dreadfully frightened about me."

Every uttered word seemed to make matters more hopeless from the mother's standpoint. She resolutely closed her lips, resolving that no provocation should induce her to say more at this time. Nay, to Marjorie's somewhat timid question put a few minutes later, "Mamma, do you really disapprove of my sending the note?" she forced herself to reply,

"Oh, I presume not, daughter. As you say, it is a matter connected with a boy-and-girl friendship, instead of between a lady and gentleman. I presume Ralph thinks of you in the light of a sister; and some boys think they can be rude to their sisters whenever they feel like it."

Poor Marjorie had said nothing of this kind, but her mother liked to think that she had.

CHAPTER XII.

A YOUNG MAN OF MOODS.

THE note was sent, and three days passed before any reply to it was received. There were reasons for this state of things. In the first place perhaps Ralph Bramlett had deteriorated more rapidly in the weeks which had intervened since he had seen Marjorie, than people can understand who do not know how rapid, at times, can be the descent of a soul. Just what forces were brought to bear upon him to help him downward would be difficult to explain. In truth there was no perceptible force; he simply slipped, and allowed himself to keep on sliding without an effort to recover himself; without even realizing that he was sliding, or at least that he had anything to do with such a state of things. It was always Fate. He did not take the midnight train for home, as he had nearly planned. It was the hapless young victim whom he had studied at the theatre who prevented him from doing that. Since the world was going against him, let it go; he would have as good a time as he could by the way. That was the mood in which he had retired for the night at a late hour. It

possessed him to an even greater degree when he arose the next morning, with a headache, and the dregs of his cold still shivering at him. He fell in, that day, with some companions who helped him in his slipping. Companions of that character can nearly always be found, even without search. At the end of three days the money he had brought with him from home was very nearly exhausted, but he stayed on, in the belief that he was looking for work; though as he would do only certain kinds of work and the market seemed to be already overstocked with people of like mind with himself, he had very little hope of success. Still, he wrote home explaining what he fancied at times was his motive for staying, and his father raised not without difficulty, the amount of money which his son believed he needed for a month's stay, and sent it to him. For this expenditure Hannah Bramlett quietly made some sacrifices of cherished hopes; not large ones, but they meant a good deal to her. At the end of ten days the money was exhausted and Ralph came home. Nothing very alarming from an outsider's point of view had occurred during his stay in New York. He had held himself from grave troubles of every sort. Nothing more important appeared on the surface than a debt of five dollars which had been borrowed in an emergency from one of his new friends. He had been assured that it was of no consequence at all, in response to his repeated statements that he would send the amount as soon as he reached home.

He knew that he would do so; that his honorable father would somehow secure the sum, though it were many times that amount, rather than have a debt stain the Bramlett name. Ralph assured himself that by so much he was like his father; and as the train sped along, he took pleasure in the thought that he was an honorable man, and that he was coming home from a first visit in the great city without any of the smirches on his name which some young men had brought from there. And yet, as has been said, Ralph had changed in many ways during that short period. One way in which it was evidenced was his manner of receiving a certain bit of information which came to him but the evening before he left the city. He fell in with a commercial traveler who had often visited his own town, and with whom he had a slight acquaintance. At that distance from home the man seemed like a friend, and Ralph confided to him his disgust for the farm and his futile efforts to secure a position to his mind.

"I'll tell you what," said the genial man, "I believe I know just the place for you. Do you understand bookkeeping? Well, then, the place is waiting for you. I suppose you know the Snyders, by reputation at least? They are looking for a bookkeeper of the right sort. He isn't easy to find. Their business is very large, you know, and they must have a man of undoubted integrity. They give a fairly good salary on the start, with a chance for increase if there is satisfaction. Fif-

teen hundred a year is more than you can clear from the farm, I fancy; and a few years of clerkship of this sort would enable you to save money enough to study law on your own account if you wanted to. There is a good deal of opportunity for study, by the way, in that sort of clerkship. It isn't steady work all the while that they pay for, you know, it's responsibility. Why not try for the place? I think I could put you in the way of getting it; our firm and the Snyders have business relations which make them very friendly. I believe our Mr. Perkins would recommend a name that I gave him, and the Snyders will be very likely to listen to Mr. Perkins. Shall I set the ball to rolling?"

Now the Snyders were well known to Ralph Bramlett; in fact, one of them had his handsome home in the same town where Ralph lived, and went to and from it every day by train to the city two hours' distant, where his business lay. It flashed through Ralph's mind that he could, very possibly, do the same, thus saving his board, and enjoying what he had always fancied he should especially like, a daily ride on the cars. Yet he hesitated. Why? Even so short a time as three weeks before he would not have hesitated for a moment. He could almost hear the echo of his answer. "No, thank you; it is a very good berth for people of like views with the Snyders; but the Bramletts for generations back have been staunch temperance men, you see; dead set

against the whole business. For his grandson to become for ever so short a time bookkeeper in a distillery would disturb even the rest of heaven for Grandfather Bramlett, I am afraid." In point of fact, there could have been no such echo, for he made no such answer. The commercial traveler, seeing his hesitation, continued:

"It isn't a subordinate position, you know; as bookkeeper you would be looked upon as a gentleman, and have more leisure and more courtesy shown you than in a lawyer's office, by a great sight; and then there is the chance to rise."

"I know," said Ralph, slowly. "It would be a very good temporary opportunity if it were not for the business. My people are prejudiced in that direction."

"Oh, because it is a distillery? I see. But then, man alive! it isn't a partnership in the concern. As a clerk who keeps the books, of course you have nothing whatever to do with the sale of liquors. Why, an angel might straighten out the books of a firm, seems to me; there is no responsibility involved, except with money."

Now the commercial traveler was honest enough; he was not a deep thinker in any direction; he had never been educated along these lines, and the matter looked to him as he had stated it. But Ralph Bramlett, as far back in his family history as he could remember anything, had known of his grandfather as a temperance thinker, speaker and writer; a radical of the radicals. His son,

Ralph's father, had so far followed in the family line as to bring up his children to believe that liquor-selling was a sin; and that all connection with it, however remote, was therefore sinful. On occasion, Ralph could argue for this side of the question, and had done so in the debating society, in a way to win commendation from certain who shook hands with him, and assured him that they remembered his grandfather, and that he was a worthy chip of the old block. Yet this young man with "feelings," not convictions, hesitated and argued weakly, and allowed himself to be convinced; and the good-natured commercial traveler "set the ball to rolling" with such success, that, before Ralph Bramlett had been at home two days he received an invitation to become bookkeeper in the firm of Snyder, Snyder & Co. On the third day he accepted it. Not until after he had sent his letter of acceptance did he tell his father and mother and Hannah. It so happened that before he told even them, he had met Estelle Douglass and made haste, he could not have told why, to explain the situation to her. She had irritated him at the time, as she nearly always did, despite the strange fascination which she had for him.

"What does Marjorie say about it?" she had exclaimed. "I don't see, for my part, why, it is not a sensible enough thing to do. As you say, you have no more to do with liquor-selling than the rest of us have; and keeping books is an

honorable enough employment; but I shouldn't have supposed that Marjorie Edmonds would have thought so for a moment; nor your father and mother, either, for that matter; but then you are of age, of course, and will do as you please; but I am amazed at Marjorie giving her consent."

Said the young man who was being swayed continually by impulse, "Why do you always speak as though Marjorie Edmonds had a mortgage on my common sense, and judgment, and everything of the sort? I have said nothing about how she regarded it; nor can I imagine why it should concern her; it is a purely business transaction with which my friends have nothing to do."

Then Estelle had laughed that trying little laugh of hers, and had answered:

"Oh, Ralph, how absurd! such old friends as you and I ought to be more honest with each other than than that. Don't I know that everything connected with you in any way concerns Marjorie Edmonds?"

Did she know how much he wished that this were true? Or did she know of the serious break between them, and was she trying to comfort, or torture him?

He studied over these questions after he got away from her, and could make nothing of them. Also, he studied himself and tried to understand why he had been so precipitate. What effect would this last step of his have on Marjorie? Be sure he had thought of her when he took it. While he

was writing his note of acceptance the reckless mood was upon him. Marjorie had chosen to get angry at nothing and throw him over, therefore he was not bound to consult her wishes. Let her be shocked if she would; it was all her own fault. But for her ill-treatment, he would not have thought of such a thing. He imagined her trying to indignantly remonstrate with him, and he gloomily telling her that she had herself to thank for the entire matter. All this was very babyish, it must be admitted, but Ralph, on occasion, could be babyish. There were actually times when he exulted in her dismay and indignation. She had brought dismay upon him, why should she not feel it in return? There were other moods during which he entered into an elaborate argument to convince her that his step was the right and wise one. Times were hard; nothing could be done on the farm during the winter; his father was growing old and needed help. He had resolved to sacrifice himself and his prospects. There was no opening in the direction of his tastes which promised immediate returns, therefore his tastes should be crucified for the good of all concerned. In that mood he felt like a martyr who had risen above the prejudices by which he was surrounded, and therefore deserved a crown.

From Estelle's interview with Marjorie, as ill-fortune would have it, she came straight to Ralph. That is, she saw him at the corner and called, and of course he waited for her. She was still uncer-

tain how Marjorie had received the news at Ralph's hands and still anxious to learn.

"I've been in to see Marjorie," she began gayly. "I thought you might like to hear from her. I really pity you, my friend, if you have an engagement with her soon, for I do not think she is in an amiable frame of mind. Oh, she did not commit herself to me; Marjorie never is particularly communicative with us girls, you know; but her mother was more frank. She said in so many words that she did not approve of your new business, at all."

"I presume she knew that that would harm no one," said Ralph in his very stiffest tone.

And then Estelle launched forth with her history of the things that Marjorie did *not* say, and with the description of her face and manner, which last was calculated to do the most harm under the circumstances.

Estelle did not mean to speak other than the truth; she did not even mean to do mischief. She liked Marjorie Edmonds, but she liked Ralph Bramlett more; there were times when it seemed to her an angel's work to save him from Marjorie's coldness and hardness if she could. She had taken certain impressions from Marjorie's silence, and these impressions she gave to Ralph for facts. By the time he had left her at her own door, his soul was in a tumult of indignation. Somehow, he had gotten the impression, from what had been told him, that Marjorie posed before the girls—

before this girl, at least—as one who owned him body and soul ; and meant to manage all his affairs for him with a steady hand, or else have none of him. Was there ever a weak man who was not afraid of being “managed” by a woman? The very suggestion put this one into a fury, and he walked away resolved upon showing the whole Edmonds set that he was his own master and meant to be.

Nothing occurred to change this mood, and in the evening came Marjorie’s letter. He received it and his sister Hannah’s words, with indignant eyes.

“Here’s a note from Marjorie ; I hope she tells you what she thinks of you. Perhaps you will care for her opinion, since you don’t for any of your own family.”

He answered her angrily that he knew his own business ; and that to get no thanks from any of his family after sacrificing his own interests for their sakes was exactly the return he expected. Then he shut his door with a bang, and sat down to read his letter.

“Dear Ralph,” were the first words. He felt all his pulses thrill and throb under their touch. The old-time, familiar words. He had piles of notes from her tied with pink ribbon, the color which she wore so much, and every one of them began “Dear Ralph.” There was no word of reproach ; no hint of any difference between them. Apparently she had not thought of such a thing.

It was just Marjorie's sweet bright self ; brushing aside as a thing of little moment an absurd rumor concerning him ; only stopping to let him know of it, so that he might say the proper things to people in return for their folly. What an unutterable fool he had been ! If now he could answer this cheery little note in the spirit in which it was sent ; could assure her that he had not, of course, given a serious thought to the opportunity which had come to him, because his principles would not admit of it ; and then could tell her in a superior and manly way of his numerous business disappointments while in the city, and enlarge upon the strangeness of " Providence " in thus closing all other avenues and putting in his way only that which his conscience would not allow him even to consider, what a letter he could write ! He was fond of expressing himself on paper, and could not help lingering over some of the sentences which he might pen, under other circumstances, even while realizing the folly of them as he had shaped things. What an opportunity was this for saying in reply to Marjorie's hint that he had friends on Maple Avenue, that, judging from the way in which he had been treated, he had feared that he had no friends there. Then he could enlarge upon the horrors of that night when she was missed and searched for frantically ; and incidentally he could hint, not in apology, but simply by way of explanation, how deeply he regretted his inability to do as she wished that night. There

were certain reasons which he could not in honor explain to her, why this was really impossible, but he had supposed that she could trust him! Was there ever a more delicate thrust than that? And to think that he had cut himself from all such possibilities! For, despite the commercial traveler's logic, and his own many arguments, something assured him that Marjorie Edmonds and Marjorie Edmonds's mother would not receive a bookkeeper in a distillery on the same footing as they had received Ralph Bramlett, farmer. No, not even if his salary were fifteen thousand dollars instead of fifteen hundred. In time he might overcome the prejudices of the daughter; his influence was potent there; the very note which he held in his hand indicated it; but the mother would discourage that influence, and would do what she could to prevent their intimacy; and it would be a long, hard, tiresome ordeal. If he had but known that Marjorie would write him such a letter as this, he would not have accepted the position; at least so he assured himself. What if he should throw it up even now? His father was bitterly disappointed in him; had told him he would rather starve than eat bread earned by a son of his through such a channel; his mother had cried, and Hannah had tossed her head and said, The Bramlett name was honored now! Suppose he should write to the Snyders, and ask for his release on the ground of his father's opposition? It would certainly appear well in a son, to show such



RALPH'S LETTER.

"Over this, Marjorie Edmonds bowed her head and cried."

deference to the wishes of his father. Ah, but there was Estelle Douglass again! Had he not talked over the family opposition with her, and assured her that he must do the best for all parties concerned, even though they reproached instead of thanked him? Would not Estelle, with her quick wits, know that it was Marjorie who had overturned the whole? And would not her quick tongue blazon it abroad? He should be a laughing-stock for the town. A man in leading strings! It would never do. He must abide by his promise. If Marjorie had not ill-treated him, he would never have made that promise. Under the sting of this thought he wrote:

“Miss Edmonds seems to have forgotten that she chose to act as though the writer had no friends on Maple Avenue. He is prompt to try to understand efforts of that kind. So far as the rumor referred to is concerned, he expects to go into business for the firm of Snyder and Snyder in two days more. When a man cannot secure what he would, he must needs take what he can get, and endure alike the reproaches of friends and the sneers of enemies.”

It was this letter over which Marjorie Edmonds bowed her head that night and cried. She had not shown it to her mother; she could not endure the thought of doing so; yet her mother must be told how utterly Ralph had failed her. She did not know that, although it was barely three hours

since the letter had gone out of his possession, that Ralph Bramlett would have given his entire prospective salary, for the sake of having it back in his hands, unread.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIVING BELOW ONE'S PRIVILEGES.

UNCLE ANTHONY had transacted one other piece of business during his day's shopping, about which he said nothing to Glyde. While she was absorbed over some "lovely" Christmas cards, he slipped back to the cashier's desk and carried on a low-toned conversation after this manner:

"What has become of that meeting which occupied your thoughts so fully a year ago?"

The cashier turned from his roll of bills with a winning smile. "It absorbs me as much as ever, and is holding its own, as usual. We meet to-night in the old place. Won't you come?"

"How many times have you asked me?" said Uncle Anthony, returning the smile. "A dozen years or so, in succession, isn't it? But I never came in search of an invitation before, did I? No, don't rejoice too soon; I'm the same old sixpence, but I have a bright new penny in my train; a little girl who is in search of a model prayer-meeting. We went to one of the up-town churches the other night, and didn't find it,—the model, you understand; and she was so disappointed that I thought of you. I've set out to entertain the

child if I can; so we may come around to your barracks to-night."

It was because of this, that at eight o'clock of that wonderful day, Glyde and her uncle entered the door of a large plain building which did not look like a church, just as the hymn was being sung that had attracted the attention of Ralph Bramlett. Had he known that the people who were just passing in were Glyde Douglass and her uncle, perhaps, for very surprise at the coincidence, he might have followed them. In that case, would some of the story of his life have been forever different? Who can tell? This was a prayer-meeting very unlike any which Glyde had associated with New York; very unlike anything which she had ever seen before. The size of it, her uncle thought, must satisfy her. The room was large, and was closely packed with human beings. It was a very plain room indeed, not a bit of upholstery anywhere, nor frescoing. The walls, which were as clean as whitewash could make them, were hung with mottoes that flashed back in glowing colors, familiar words: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Ho! every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool." And others less familiar, at least to Glyde, but very striking. The room was brightly lighted, and the seats, though so plain, were comfortable. Every one seemed to have singing books. Indeed,

almost the first thing Glyde noticed was a row of young men near the door, one of whom darted towards them as they entered, with two singing books open to the hymn which was being sung. Glyde knew the hymn and joined in the singing almost before she was seated; there was such a volume of song filling the room that she could not help singing.

The hour that followed will stand out in her memory forever. Her experience with prayer-meetings was confined to the church of which she was a member. A large, well-appointed church with a small prayer-meeting, and a pastor who was struggling with the problem of how to make it sufficiently interesting to win to a regular attendance those who had covenanted to sustain it. As yet, this was an unsolved problem; it will describe to those interested in prayer-meetings the condition of things as fully as if a page had been written concerning it. Glyde was used to decorous, proper-sounding prayers, in response to invitations from her pastor. Most of the people who prayed were more or less cultured; at least, sufficiently familiar with the use of language to choose smooth, flowing words, and to ask for the usual proper things. Glyde, listening, had wondered how they ever had the courage to offer the first prayer. Did they write it out, she queried, and commit it to memory? and did they, by degrees, add a word here, and a sentence there, until they had it to their mind? The prayers did not vary

greatly, she observed, through the months; certain phrases were nearly always present; proper ones, beautiful ones indeed, meaning a great deal; but Glyde had grown so used to them that sometimes they did not mean much to her; she had wondered if they did to the petitioners. She had rejoiced in the thought that she was a woman and would therefore not be called upon for such duty; for the various religious organizations springing up over the country in which women took equal part with men had not yet found favor in the town where she lived. But, in this meeting, were men and women who prayed apparently as naturally as they breathed. The petitions seemed to come from those who were just thinking aloud. Very brief, for the most part. Heart-cries for help, for strength, for encouragement, to One who was expected to understand without explanation, all the details. "Lord, help me to be true where thou hast placed me. "Lord, I thank thee for sustaining grace to-day." "Father, I want to be faithful, strengthen me." "Lord Jesus, remember my temptations." These and a dozen other petitions followed in quick succession; and the voices of the women apparently excited not the slightest surprise in any mind but hers. Looking about her, during the next song service, she discovered some of the faces which she had imagined she might see in New York. Men and women, and even young girls, who looked as though their experiences of life must have been far from satisfactory. Still,

they were all decently dressed, and behaved with the utmost decorum, so they could not be of the lowest. It was an extraordinary mixture, to this novice, who yet had studied faces somewhat and found a charm in doing so. Some of the people were unmistakably from the cultured world. Their dress did not indicate it, for even Glyde herself in her elegant new sack felt almost too fine for the place, but there was an unmistakable air of ease and refinement about them which had to do with a daily life quite above that which Glyde lived, for instance; yet they mingled as naturally with these people and seemed to be as entirely of their mind as though they were brothers and sisters. It soon became apparent that not only reformed men were present but reformed women and girls. One, a girl not older than Glyde herself, arose and said, "Since I gave myself to God I have had peace for the first time in my sinful life!" and the marks of sin were so apparent on her old-young face that even Glyde could read. Yet a lady sitting near, sweet-faced, pure as a lily, whose voice when she sang gave forth the exquisite melody of a highly cultivated one, turned as the girl sat down and smiling as an angel might, clasped the hard bare hand in a warm human grasp which brought the tears to Glyde's eyes. What must it have done for the girl?

All over the room they arose, as witnesses to the power of God to save from the drink habit, the gambling habit, and the curse of other sins

too low in the scale to be mentioned ; earnestness was written all over their strong, sin-marked faces ; earnestness throbbed in their every word ; not only earnestness but something better than joy, something the girl had expressed by that word " peace."

Then, perhaps, the next voice would be from that other, sheltered, cultured world, and the face would indicate purity and strength ; yet the witness would be the same, the power of God to keep in peace and safety from small temptations, so-called, as well as from great ones.

As Glyde listened and sang and joined in the prayers, her heart grew warm as never before with the sense of fellowship in Christ. Surely this was a prayer-meeting which her Uncle Anthony could approve. She glanced at him occasionally but could make nothing from his face. He sat very still, not even joining in the singing, of which he was exceptionally fond ; much of the time his face was shaded by his hand. She could not be sure whether he was interested or bored. She did not know how entirely he had been taken into his sweet and sorrowful past. He used occasionally to go with her aunt Estelle to such meetings, he had avoided them almost fiercely for years ; only his love for the " little girl " he had found, and the desire to please her in every way, had broken through his grim resolve, and brought him again into the atmosphere which he had dreaded.

Not far from them was a young man to whom Glyde gave some interested thought. There was

something about him which made her think that he was a stranger, like herself. He watched with a certain suppressed eagerness to see what would be done next; he listened with marked intensity to every word which was spoken; he joined in the singing as though his soul were in it; yet he was from another class than most of the young men; a gentleman in every respect Glyde decided, and one who had always lived a life that honored his mother. Was he a Christian, she wondered? She was not used to young gentlemen who were Christians. Now that she thought of it, she lived in a town where it did not seem to be the custom for young men to attend prayer-meetings, even the estimable young men, those who waited sometimes at the church doors to attend their friends home nearly always waited *at the doors*; it did not seem to be expected that they would come farther. She had not given the matter much thought, but how many she could recall whom this state of things described. There was Ralph Bramlett, for instance, who was an intimate friend of their family, who passed their house on his way to and from town, and often stopped to chat with them; who had walked with them more than once as far as the church door on prayer-meeting evenings, when they had chanced to meet. Yet she had never heard the girls ask him to go in to the meeting, nor express surprise that he never came. But then, to be sure, Ralph was not a Christian, and neither was Marjorie Edmonds; perhaps if

she were, it would be different with Ralph. Perhaps if they were both in the habit of attending such prayer-meetings as this, they might be helped to enter that way; surely they could not remain in such an atmosphere long without wanting to be one with it. And then poor Glyde fell to wondering where, in her part of the world, such an atmosphere as this could be found. Would Ralph and Marjorie be likely to be helped by the prayer meeting which she was in the habit of attending? Pity the girl, and pity the church to which she belonged, because she was in all honesty obliged to confess to her secret soul that she was afraid they would not be; that it was, too often, only a duty and a weariness to her. Then the young man suddenly broke in upon her train of thought by springing to his feet.

“Brethren,” he began, “I cannot resist adding my word as a witness. I am a stranger in the city; this is the first time I have been in a prayer-meeting since I left home; but I find myself among brothers and sisters, those who serve under the Leader to whom I belong; those who have discovered for themselves the power of God to save, and to keep. Brothers, if some of you have not tried that power, I add my voice to-night to help to convince you of its reality.” Then followed such words as Glyde felt must help the rows and rows of young men who listened earnestly. They helped her. No, she certainly did not know any young man like this one; she wished that she did.

When the meeting was concluded, Glyde was surprised to see a middle-aged gentleman rush toward her uncle and hold out his hand.

“We are so glad to see you here once more!” he said, “We have missed your visits very much. Isn’t the question settled yet, brother? When I saw you to-night my heart gave a great leap of joy; I thought we should hear from you.”

“Never mind me,” said Uncle Anthony cheerily. “Give your attention to the young people; to that end, let me introduce my niece; she is one of your kind, I suspect; at least she was hungering and thirsting after a prayer-meeting.”

“I am glad to see you,” the gentleman said, giving Glyde a hearty grasp of the hand; “now I must return the kindness and introduce my nephew. Paul, this way please. “Mr. Burwell, Miss Douglass; my nephew from the West.” And Glyde found herself exchanging greetings with the young man whose words had helped her. He *was* a stranger then, like herself, and yet his heart had been so full of the theme that he could not keep silence. What if she had tried to tell what Jesus Christ was to her! The mere thought of it set all her pulses to bounding. “I don’t think I could have done it;” she told herself sorrowfully, “and yet I do love Him and I want to be His witness.”

Just behind her stood a young girl who had prayed, and spoken a few words. Glyde remembered the words: “To-day, under strong tempta-

tion to anger, my heart trusted in Him, and I was helped." She was a plain, common-looking girl in coarse dress, and without any gloves at all; yet Glyde gazed upon her with a feeling of respect almost amounting to awe. How wonderful that she could stand and say quietly such words in a prayer-meeting. Nay, how wonderful to be able to say them at all. To be sure of having been helped in her common-place daily life by the Lord Jesus Christ!

They passed out into the street together; her uncle and the elder Mr. Burwell, who were evidently old acquaintances, were talking earnestly. Naturally Mr. Paul Burwell dropped back beside her.

"It was good to be there, was it not?" he said. "I have been half tempted to be homesick in this great city; but this evening I found myself at home."

Said Glyde, "How many men there were who seemed to have sorely needed help and found it."

"Yes, indeed! Reformed men; a large number of them; and reformed women. Did you notice the woman on your left, three or four seats down? My uncle says she has been a terrible character; one of the most to be feared in the city, perhaps, because of her influence over younger ones. Five months ago Christ won her; and now she is a power in that meeting and in her neighborhood. Isn't it a blessed thought, Miss Douglass, that we have never yet heard testimony like this: 'I cried

unto the Lord and he would not answer. I plead for help and received none.' ”

“Do you suppose there is never such testimony?” asked Glyde, slowly, wonderingly. She did not know how to converse about religion; she felt embarrassed at the thought of trying to do so; but she must be honest. Not even for the sake of appearances would she pretend by silence or evasive answer, that prayer was to her what it seemed to be to those people.

“I mean,” she explained, “do not people often, or at least sometimes pray, and receive no answer?”

“People who are in need, and who feel their need and cry to Him for help? No. How could they? He cannot deny Himself. Hasn't He promised? Oh, we often pray, I presume, for what He will not for our own sakes give us; and we often pray for that which we do not with all our hearts desire; but I mean cases of *felt* need such as were represented there to-night. To all such, I think, He has said: “Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear. Pardon me, Miss Douglass, but do you not know the truth of this from your own experience?”

“I—think so;” she said thoughtfully. “At least I mean I hope I know Him in that sense. In fact I *know* I do. I belong to Him, Mr. Burwell, and there are some ways in which I could have witnessed for Him if I only had the courage. But I do not think I can speak so positively as I could,

—last winter for instance, and as I thought then, I always should. To be entirely frank, I have a half dissatisfied feeling over my religion a great deal of the time ; and yet I would not be without it ; but somehow I want it to be more to me than it is. I do not suppose I am making myself understood ; and I do not know why I am speaking in this way to a stranger.”

“I understand you, perfectly. We are not strangers ; we both claim the Elder Brother as our own. Will you forgive me for suggesting that perhaps you are trying to be satisfied with less than He can give? When I first united with the church, I tried to content myself with living as others did around me ; and as it was a cold church, one in which the young people met often socially without saying a word about their Leader, or hinting in any way that they had a Leader to whom they were glad to give supreme control, you can imagine the result. I was dissatisfied, discontented, half-hearted, and a good deal of the time miserable. When I found,—some time afterward—that Christ was willing to be a centre around which my business and my pleasures as well as my hours of direct service could gather, and that to accept him as the literal centre of all my time, was the only way to be a happy Christian, I really think I was glad of it ; for I had been having a most unhappy time ; because in some way my convictions had gotten ahead of my practice.”

This was strange new talk to Glyde ; yet her

heart went out to meet it. She felt that it was true. She had been trying to be satisfied to do as Estelle and Fannie and the other girls who were church members, did. So far as outward life was concerned she *had* done as they did. When had she spoken with any person about Jesus Christ? How did she make it known to anybody that he was the one who had supreme control? She had wished quite earnestly that Ralph Bramlett and Marjorie were Christians, and had prayed for them both; but—had she ever in any way hinted to either of them that she cared whether they knew Christ or not? Why had she not? Was it not because others did not talk about these things, and she did not like to seem so different from others?

“ I think you are right,” she said impulsively, speaking hastily as she saw that her uncle and his friend had halted at the corner just ahead, and were evidently planning to take different routes. “ I have been willing to stay below my privileges. In fact, I think I never realized what my privileges were until to-night. I believe it will be different with me hereafter because of your words. Thank you.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A LOOK BACKWARD AND FORWARD.

MAJORIE EDMONDS sat long that night, confronting her problem. She kept faith with her mother and opened the door between the rooms when she was ready for bed, but the watchful mother knew that this time did not come until the night was far spent. The girl made no record in her diary. It is noticeable that, with young people, diaries are for happy hours. When grave and desolating questions press down upon them, they want better confidants than those.

For the first time in her life this young girl faced the situation as it was, and tried to understand it. Ralph Bramlett had failed her; that was too evident. The playmate of her childhood whom she had alternately commanded and petted, the schoolmate of her girlhood whom she had held to a high standard in his classes by the spirit of emulation, the young man whose development she had watched with delight and a secret sense of ownership such as she felt sure no other human being could feel, had in the space of a few weeks so changed that he could write her the letter which was spread open before her, and which she had

read until it seemed as though every word was engraved upon her heart. It was an utter bewilderment to her. In all her curious questionings concerning her future there had never for one moment come to her a thought of it as separated from Ralph Bramlett. Had she then expected to become the wife of a man who had never so much as mentioned the subject of marriage to her? She blushed painfully as she asked herself this question. Her thoughts of the future had all been girlish, even childish; she had not considered the questions of love and marriage; there had simply been a rose-colored stretch of years in which she and Ralph, and mother, walked gayly down the paths, always together, and always happy. But now that she had suddenly become a woman, she reminded herself that although Ralph had never mentioned the subject of marriage to her, yet she had a woman's right to think of him as her future husband. Had he not shown her in every possible way, ever since she was a child, that she was always first in his thoughts? Since childhood had been left in the distance and they had been looked upon by others as grown people, had not his attentions become if possible more marked than ever, until everybody who knew them said "Ralph and Marjorie" as naturally as though they were indeed of one name? She took herself sternly to task for her blushing. She had the right to claim him. Not that she was by any means in haste to be married, she told herself, or had

ever given a serious thought in her life to that phase of the question; it was only that of course they were to be together in some way, and to be always more to each other than to any other persons; that being the case, she must have known, she assured herself, that there was but one way of accomplishing it. But there was no occasion for feeling humiliated over such a thought, for if anybody had been sought, she could truly say that she had. The question for consideration was, what did Ralph's present conduct indicate? Had he been simply playing with her all these years? That was nonsense! Had he been disappointed in her, or mistaken in his feelings? Was it only as a boy that he cared for her, and when he began to call himself a man had he found that she did not satisfy his nature? That must be the explanation of his strange conduct. It was folly for her to try longer to deceive herself and say that she had ill-treated him; it is one thing to speak coldly to a man who has been rude to one, and quite another for that man to answer a note written with the old-time friendliness in the heartless way in which Ralph had answered her.

"Miss Edmonds," indeed! why he had never before called her that! But more and infinitely worse than all these small matters was the fact, placed on paper by himself, and staring her in the face, that he had gone directly contrary not only, to her ideas of honor, but to what she had supposed were his convictions of right. Ralph

Bramlett bookkeeper in a distillery ! The thing seemed so incredible that she found herself looking again at the letter to make sure that those were the words written thereon. Was there not some reading "between the lines" to prove that this was a horrid joke? In truth, it was a night which might well make a vivid impress upon Marjorie Edmonds's memory. Such a night of disappointment, and pain, and searching, and surrender as she had never before endured. It came to her at last, and came overwhelmingly, that she must give up this friend of her childhood and womanhood ; that all the pleasant days they had spent together were past, and all the pleasant days which were planned for the future, were not to be. Ralph was strangely, mysteriously changed ; henceforth she was to be to him "Miss Edmonds," and she must learn to call him "Mr. Bramlett." This girl of nineteen, who understood life as little as she did her own heart, felt nevertheless, as real a pang over the breaking of her idol, and the tearing away of all the pretty fabric of her imagined future, as though they had been worth the sorrow. Yet she resolutely tore them away. She had made all the concessions and advances that she could ; more than she ought, perhaps. It might be that Ralph had been annoyed by her writing to him in the old familiar way. That very act might even have helped to show him how mistaken he had been in her. Nay, he might have planned his whole conduct with a view

to making plain to her his changed feelings; and she in her ignorance had not thought of such a thing; but had credited him with obstinacy, and an overweening fear of silly tongues. Then, suddenly, there flashed upon her another thought; perhaps, after all, Ralph did not fear Estelle Douglass as much as she had imagined. Perhaps, instead, he admired her. They had talked freely together over her shortcomings in the past; but the past was ever so long ago,—ages ago it seemed to this poor girl,—Ralph had changed in other respects, why not in that one?

The longer she considered it, the more she felt this to be the solution; Ralph had discovered that Estelle Douglass was to be the friend of his maturer years. Then pride came to her rescue. If such were really the case, he need not fear any interference on her part. She began to feel bitterly humiliated over the thought of her note to him. Why had she not listened to her mother when she hinted that Ralph might misunderstand her writing? It is true the mother had meant nothing of this kind, but Marjorie's nerves were in a state to so translate it. Having settled that she had discovered at last the true cause of the change in Ralph, a dozen questions came up at once for consideration. How should she plan her immediate future with regard to this lost friend? Should she gather all the notes and letters, literally hundreds of them, which had accumulated through the years—for when people are two miles apart and

like to write, many excuses can be found for notes—and, packing them all, tied in pink ribbons as they were, in a neat box, together with the little keepsakes which had come as birthday and Christmas offerings, send them to him? With this thought in view she brought out the box and began to look over its contents.

How amused her mother had been, away back in her childhood when she had assured her that she was going to keep every note of Ralph's! Her cheeks burned over the memory of the words she had spoken in her babyhood. "Mamma, when I am an old woman, and Ralph is an old man—won't it be funny, mamma, for us to be old?—then we shall like to sit together and look over these letters, won't we? Here is one that tells about our first birthday party that we had together. Isn't it nice that our birthdays are only a week apart and we can always celebrate them together? And here is one about our picnic that we got up. How funny it will be, when our hairs are white, to read them over and remember all the nice times we had."

In the solitude of her own room she felt the hot blood mounting to her temples over these memories as they came surging back upon her. Then her face began to pale and her heart to tremble over the thought that their future, hers and Ralph's, sitting together reading letters would never come. Instead, Ralph would sit in that large arm-chair she had imagined, with his white head leaning

against the cushions, and Estelle beside him, talking over together the plans that they two had formed; and Marjorie would be left out and forgotten!

Finally she decided that the letters and the keepsakes should not be returned; that would look as though she had made serious business of them, and Ralph Bramlett was never to know that she had made serious business of anything that he had ever said to her. That should be her role for the future; boy-and-girl friends she and Ralph had been; nothing more; both had grown up now; it was time to put childish things away; both had put them away; that was all. Never mind if her heart broke in the process; no one should know it. Even her mother must never imagine what she had suffered in putting away her childhood dream. "Boy-and-girl friendship," the mother had called it, and that it must remain to her. Poor foolish child! Little she understood what a mother's eyes and heart can read.

That good woman, with her head resting on her pillow, was fully as wakeful as her daughter, and her thoughts were quite as busy and anxious. Could she have known what decision that daughter had reached, she might almost have gone peacefully to sleep. What she feared was the renewal of old friendship, upon a new basis; a basis which both the young people would understand as having to do with a settled future. Not that she believed it possible that Marjorie Edmonds would

ever submit to becoming the wife of a man employed in a distillery ; her temperance principles were too ingrained for that ; the danger was, that Marjorie's stronger will would assert itself, and that Ralph would speedily find some way out of the business engagement which he had made, and that all differences would be smoothed over. And then this woman also took a journey into the past, and remembered how amused she had been over Ralph and Marjorie in their childish devotedness to each other ; how she had laughed with her neighbors about their friendship ; how she had petted the two almost equally through their period of early youth, and only lately had begun to be anxious over the natural results of such bringing up. If she had it to live over again, this life, how differently she would order all things. Then she moralized a little. What a pity it was that people could not go back over their lives, just once, after their eyes had been opened to their mistakes. What different experiences they could make possible !

So, for these various reasons, it was quite the beginning of a new day before sleep came to the Edmonds's home.

Notwithstanding Marjorie's resolve that her mother should know nothing about the changed condition of things, before evening of the next day she had shown her Ralph Bramlett's note. Whatever Mrs. Edmonds's mistakes as a mother may have been, she had succeeded in establishing and main-

taining the most perfect intimacy between her daughter and herself; and for Marjorie to hide from view such a letter as that was to act in direct contradiction to the principles in which she had been reared. Her first intention had been to say to her mother that her letter had been answered, and that the answer was not satisfactory, and keep the details of that answer to herself; but before evening she had decided that this would be treating her mother with injustice and discourtesy; so she gave her the letter without comment, and waited in silence while it was being read. It was so different from the letter which Mrs. Edmonds had schooled her heart to expect and astonished her so, that for some moments she was entirely silent; feeling unable to decide how to meet such a revelation. At last she asked almost timidly,

“What do you make of this, daughter?”

The daughter had expected a burst of indignation, which, in attempting to overcome, would almost oblige her to take Ralph's part. It was harder to meet this quiet question.

“There seems to be but one explanation possible,” she said at last; “Ralph is evidently tired of our friendship and has taken this way of bringing it to an end.”

“He takes an unnecessarily troublesome and disagreeable way, then!” said Mrs. Edmonds, waxing indignant over the realization of what such an admission as this must mean to her daughter.

Yet despite the indignation there was an undertone of intense joy. What a merciful interposition of Providence it would seem if Ralph would, with his own rash hand, break the ties which had bound him to her child; break them so utterly that there need be no fear of their ever being fastened again. It meant present suffering for Marjorie, of course; that was part of the penalty which she, the mother, must bear for her folly; but that the suffering could be very deep or very lasting the mother did not believe. She was an older student of human nature than her daughter, and she was unalterably sure that Ralph Bramlett would never have satisfied that daughter's maturer heart. Still, she could afford to be indignant with Ralph for his way of managing.

"I thought," she added, seeing that Marjorie kept silent, "that he could, as a rule, be gentlemanly, but he seems to have lost every semblance of a gentleman. I admire your self-control, Marjorie, in being able to be so quiet over such a letter as that, in reply to the extremely kind one which you wrote to him. Yet I cannot but be glad that you have received it. Do you not see, dear, how different his character is from that which you have imagined it? What I have for some time been aware of must be beginning to be plain to you."

"Nothing is plain to me," said Marjorie, "save that the old friendship is broken. I have not understood Ralph, that is all. I supposed that his

conduct of late, was simply the result of a passing vexation ; instead of which, he is evidently tired of me. Yet, after all, I presume I have brought this upon myself. It certainly was very rude and disagreeable in me to march away alone in the middle of the night, and not only give them all such a fright, but expose him to the ridicule that he must have had to bear ever since,—for my sake. I did not think for a moment of his side of the question, or I would not have done it. It was only you, mamma, that I thought about, and planned for. But the whole thing exposed him to unnecessary and disagreeable experiences such as I did not in the least realize until I heard Estelle go on about it. Perhaps it is not strange that he has decided that my friendship is not worth having.”

She was blaming herself altogether ; the next thing would be a humble apology to Ralph and a meek acceptance of perhaps even the distillery ! The mother could not endure it.

“Marjorie,” she said after a moment’s silence, and the change in her voice made the daughter feel that something very serious must be coming. “Do you not think that that is a very childish way of looking at the whole matter ? Too childish for one of your years ? A mere difference of opinion between two persons, leading each to choose his or her own way of managing a matter, while it may be unpleasant, has no very lasting results with sensible people. If Ralph Bramlett really valued your friendship at any time, and was worthy of it, he

would not have broken with you on such slight provocation. Would he?"

"I told you, mamma," said Marjorie trying not to let her voice tremble, "that I thought he had grown tired of me and took this way of making it known."

"And I think nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Edmonds, her indignation rising uncontrollably. "What I think and believe is, that he is a conceited, self-indulgent, obstinate, passionate boy, who thinks to bring you to humiliating terms, by holding aloof from you and nursing his ill temper, until you realize how serious a matter a difference with him can be. It was this in part which led him to accept a position which he knew would be utterly obnoxious not only to you, but to your mother. He expects you to write him, in reply to this, a heart-breaking letter assuring him of your undying friendship, and your willingness to continue the friendship even though he become a rumseller. Do you really think, Marjorie, that a young man capable of acting as he has, and with the motives which have evidently actuated him, is worthy of your friendship?" For your mother's sake, my dear, if not for your own, I hope you will break with him utterly now; let him understand distinctly that he cannot play revengefully with a girl of your character."

She was saying a great deal more than she had meant to when she began. She was conscious that she was overdoing the matter; doing mischief

perhaps for her own cause; yet she seemed unable to resist this temptation to express herself freely for once, with regard to Ralph Bramlett's character.

But Marjorie took it all quietly enough; perhaps because she did not believe a word of it; but thought that her mother was misjudging Ralph with almost every sentence. She did not feel revengeful herself; only humble and sorrowful. Ralph was disappointed in her and had cast her aside; that she believed was the plain fact. It was bitter enough, but she did not want any one to know it. If it would comfort her mother to feel that he had not cast her off, but was waiting and hoping to hear from her again, she might get what relief she could out of the thought; it brought none to Marjorie.

Mrs. Edmonds's outburst had one unfortunate effect; there was less sympathy between mother and daughter than ever before. Each retired to her room that night with a sense of loneliness such as never had come to them since they had been lonely together.

CHAPTER XV.

A SURPRISING DECISION.

GLYDE DOUGLASS was at home again, with her wonderful story to tell, and her wonderful gifts to display ; she had not spent that two dollars after all. Uncle Anthony had counseled her to keep it forever as a souvenir,—as a curiosity ; to prove that one girl could spend two weeks in New York and come home again with money in her pocket. The gifts he had bought he assured her were her own tokens, to be presented by herself. To this end he had carefully boxed, and marked each individual article with her full name, and he got into such a hurry at last that he waited only to see her safely off the cars at her own station, then sprang back again and continued his journey westward. Truth to tell, he had overstayed the extreme limit of his time in order to give Glyde as much of an outing as possible. His visit, he told her, could afford to wait until next year.

Never had a home-coming in the Douglass family made more of a stir. During the days of her absence it had been discovered that Glyde was really an important person. Every member of the family had been so accustomed to having her to appeal to

for assistance on all possible occasions, that to miss her presence and help was a revelation. Not one of them had realized, before, how helpful she was. They welcomed the old Glyde with open arms. But the girl who came back to them was in a certain sense a new Glyde. A day or two after her return, Estelle found herself looking at her sister curiously. Certainly she was changed; an indefinable something was there, which Estelle, at least, had never before discovered. Was it self-assertion? But Glyde had never been sweeter or more unselfish. It could not be her dress entirely, though there was change enough about that. Uncle Anthony had not contented himself with the stylish sack; before the first Sabbath which they spent in New York had arrived, he had discovered a ready-made dress which was exactly to his mind, and which he said matched the sack; despite Glyde's earnest protests and explanations, he forced her to try it on, and to admit that the fit was perfect. Then he ordered it sent to their hotel in triumph. After that there were gloves, and handkerchiefs, and a cunning little muff; things which he continually explained belonged to the sack and felt lonesome away from it. There was a hat, with a plume which was exactly the shade of the muff. In short, Uncle Anthony could not be restrained until his "little girl's" wardrobe had undergone entire transformation. When she was attired in her new suit, with the fifteen dollar pin fastening the bit of lace at her throat, the re-

flection which the girl's mirror gave back must certainly have pleased her artistic eye. Yet strangely enough, at that moment she thought of the girl in the coarse dress and gloveless hands who had told in the meeting about being kept from the temptation to anger. Why should Glyde Douglass have so much, and that girl so little? She said something of the sort to her uncle, but he turned it aside with one of his gay replies :

“ I have nothing whatever to do with that girl, and much with this one. For once in my life I mean to have the pleasure of seeing her dressed according to my fancy, even though some girl, whom I never saw, goes without new shoe-strings in consequence.”

But this thought, and many others which were new to her, lingered with Glyde after her home-coming. Especially did the influence of that prayer-meeting, and the talk she had had with Paul Burwell linger. They had to do with the subtle difference in her which every member of her family noticed.

She was alone one evening in the little room which opened from the parlor, and which was dignified by the name of music-room. In the parlor was Ralph Bramwell, waiting for Estelle, who was to accompany him to a lecture. Glyde was busy with the music, assorting, rearranging, trying to bring order out of the confusion which was always to be found about the piano after a stormy day, during which the girls amused themselves more

with music than at other times. As she worked, she hummed a familiar tune that lingered pleasantly in her thoughts. It was the one which was being sung when she and her uncle entered that large plain room every corner of which was photographed on her memory. She was not conscious that she was humming, until the curtains suddenly parted and Ralph appeared.

“You are singing a favorite tune of mine,” he said; “you couldn’t guess where I last heard it.

“I know where I did,” said Glyde, “and I should think I might be able to trace your association with it; you have heard it often in our own church. It is one of Marjorie’s favorites, you know; she uses it sometimes as a solo.”

“I know; but I heard it, last, in New York, as I passed a—church, I suppose it was, though it didn’t look like one. It was not being sung as a solo; a great many people were singing, I should judge. It sounded very well indeed; I was almost tempted inside to get nearer to it.”

Said Glyde, “Why, that is a strange coincidence! The last time I heard it was in New York, and I was inside of a large plain building which was a church, or at least a hall where they hold church services, and a great many people were singing. What if it should have been the same evening? When was it, Ralph? We were in New York at the same time, you know.” She proceeded to give him a careful statement as to date and surroundings.

“Then our associations with it must be the same, in a way,” said Ralph. “It was on that very evening and in just that locality that I halted at the door, half tempted to spend what I supposed then would be the only evening I had for New York, in a religious meeting, in order for a nearer approach to an old tune.” He laughed as he spoke, as though the idea must be an absurd one to Glyde.

She regarded him wistfully. “Oh, Ralph! I wish so much that you had come in. I am sure you never attended such a meeting as that was; and perhaps it would have done even more for you than for—” she broke off abruptly, not inclined to be confidential with Ralph Bramlett as to what the meeting had done for her. After a moment she began again, still with that wistful look on her face.

“Ralph, do you know I cannot help wishing very much that you were a Christian?” She could not keep her voice from trembling as she spoke. Even so simple a demonstration as this was a startling departure from her habit of life. It was a development from that statement which she had made to Mr. Burwell to the effect that life would be different with her after this.

Ralph laughed in a slightly embarrassed way; this was new to him also; and was almost as much of a surprise as though a kitten had suddenly appealed to him in human speech.

“Why in the world should you wish that?”

he asked, more because a reply of some sort seemed to be necessary than because he needed to have such a wish explained.

“Why shouldn’t I?” she asked, “and why shouldn’t you, above everything else? Isn’t it strange how we go on living; just as busy as we can be day after day and year after year with the less important things; the most important ones not being so much as thought of, apparently? It has always seemed strange to me. Before I was a Christian at all, I used to think people acted very foolishly about such matters. Yet, after all, when I became a Christian myself, I acted just like most others. But I don’t want to; and I don’t mean to any more. I do wish very much indeed that you were a Christian man. I thought of you first, because—well, I knew you better than I do most young men. At that meeting to which you didn’t go, Ralph, there were ever so many young men, and they all took part in the meeting; spoke as witnesses for Christ; it did seem so grand, and so reasonable too. It seems to me we ought to expect young men almost more than young women, because one would think they would be drawn to Jesus Christ in a peculiar manner, and want Him for their friend. Of course you think about such things, sometimes, Ralph; how is it that you do not choose Jesus Christ for your intimate friend?”

This point-blank question coming from a child, as Glyde Douglass had always seemed to him, as-

tonished and all but confused the young man. She was looking steadily at him out of bright, earnest eyes, and seemed to expect a definite answer which he did not know how to make. It happened that this was the first direct question of the kind which had come to him since childhood; still, of course, there was no way but to make an evasive response.

“How do you know I ever think of such abstruse matters?” he asked, trying to speak lightly, and in the tone which he might use to a very young person.

“Because,” she said gravely, “you have not seemed to me like an entirely frivolous person, and I cannot think that any save the utterly thoughtless leave such questions out of their minds entirely. If I am in the least acquainted with you, I should think you would be the kind of man who would want Jesus for a friend. Do you not admire His character? It grows upon one so, as one studies it. The only character the world has ever known which did not in any least little way disappoint one. I should think a young man would have, oh, almost a consuming ambition to grow like Him. That is what I want for myself; to take Him for my model, and try every day to have something about me which will remind others of Him.”

“That is a pretty large ambition for a young girl,” said Ralph, still bent upon treating the whole matter lightly, and still speaking in that half-condescending tone which some people use to those

very much younger than themselves. She took his words with utmost seriousness.

“Yes, I know it is, but not an impossible one; that is what seems so very wonderful about it all; It is one of the things He came especially to do for us, you know: that we might be ‘conformed to His image.’ That is the verse I have taken for my motto and daily reminder. ‘To be conformed to His image.’ Is not that an ambition worth having? You have studied His character in a historical way, haven’t you, Ralph?”

It struck the young man as a humiliating thing to have to answer this question in the negative; he made his answer as careless as possible.

“I cannot say that I ever have; at least not what you would call study, perhaps; though of course I am more or less familiar with the story, as it is set down for us.”

As he spoke he was conscious of a feeling of relief in the thought that he need not undergo a cross-examination with regard to even this superficial knowledge; still, with the relief, there was a sense of humiliation: it was, as Glyde intimated, somewhat surprising that a man who prided himself upon his common sense and thoughtfulness, should have to confess ignorance of a character so easily studied and so universally acknowledged as this one. If he could pose as an infidel or an unbeliever in the Bible in any sense of the word it would perhaps be different; though even then, he admitted that an honest unbeliever ought to be

familiar with the evidences, before he rejected them. But believing fully, as he did, in such tremendous truths as those which circled around Jesus Christ, it was certainly humiliating to have to admit that he had lived all these years without making a careful study of them.

There were movements overhead which indicated that Estelle might soon be with them, and Glyde made haste to finish what she wanted to say.

“But, Ralph, that doesn’t seem like your usual good sense, does it? I wish so very much that both you and Marjorie could be led to study this question with the care which its importance deserves. There could be but one result, for you are both so sensible; and Marjorie is the sweetest girl in the world; there needs only one added touch to make her life perfect. She would be interested in it if you were; it seems perfectly natural to think of you and she studying things together. Won’t you promise to think about it?”

His reply was very disappointing.

“You are a good little girl,” he said graciously, “a great deal better than most of your friends, it seems to me. I feel especially honored in being the one you have selected to present these new ideas to. They are rather new, are they not?”

“Ah, but that isn’t promising anything,” she said earnestly.

“No; I am rather afraid of promises; they mean altogether too much to me; being a man of my

word, you see, I have to look out for them ; I promise to be very glad that I have such a good little friend as you to interest yourself in me, and I have no doubt we should all be improved if we thought more about such matters than we do."

Then Estelle came down and he turned back to the parlor to meet her, leaving Glyde with a sadly disappointed heart. Ralph Bramlett would never know what force of will it had taken to overcome her usual reserve and speak to him out of her deeper feeling ; and to realize that it had been for naught, was bitter.

However, Ralph Bramlett was not so entirely indifferent to the whole matter as he had professed. The simple yet evidently earnest words which had been spoken to him on an unusual subject, lingered with him. He let Estelle chatter, as they walked down the street together, and went over the conversation, sentence by sentence. It was a curious thing for a child to do, he told himself. Some new influence must have touched her ; perhaps she had fallen in with a different class of friends from those he had met in New York. Suppose he had gone in to that prayer-meeting ; would he have met a different class of persons and been influenced by them ? Actually, he speculated over the thought and was curious about it ! Then he recalled the promise for which he had been asked, and smiled indulgently over the idea of his promising that child anything ! Yet it was certainly very pretty in her to ask it, and eminently

sensible. She had linked his name with Marjorie's as a matter of course, and that had been soothing. It is true that he had not so much as exchanged bows with Marjorie during the weeks that he had now been in the employ of Snyder, Snyder and Co., but he looked every day for a change in that direction. Each evening on reaching home, he went eagerly over his mail, and questioned closely with regard to any messages that might have been brought for him. His belief was that if he gave Marjorie time enough, she would write in reply to his note, asking why he had absented himself so persistently, and remind him once more that he had friends on Maple Avenue.

Such a note as he had planned that she should write him, he had decided would be a sufficient balm to his wounded feelings to admit of his calling and talking over with her the entire matter. After that, he determined that their friendship should be re-established upon an entirely different basis. By this time Marjorie would have learned that she must not undertake to control him in any way; that he was master, as a man should be, and that her duty as a woman was to yield at all times to his superior judgment. Thus much mischief her last note to him had wrought: it had removed from his mind any shadow of fear as to the final result of the difference between them. A girl who could, after his weeks of absence and silence write to him in the extremely kind way that she had, must think a very great deal of him indeed;

quite as much as he thought of her; it was only a matter of time for him to re-establish himself in the Edmonds family; or rather to settle himself as an assured force there; for he believed that Marjorie had quite as much influence over her mother as he had over her. He must simply be patient and bide his time; then all would be well between them; much better than it ever had been; for the more he thought about it the more he was convinced that Marjorie had been too willing to direct, and too sure that he would follow her lead.

Meantime, while he was waiting, it would do no harm to cultivate the friendship of Estelle Douglass. She evidently enjoyed his society, and it would not injure his cause with Marjorie for her to learn that he was not cut off from friendly companionship because she had chosen to break with him. You will observe that he had given up any idea that he was to blame in all this matter. On the contrary, he had begun to congratulate himself on his good judgment in not exposing a company of young people to a long ride in the night air, when it could as well be taken by daylight. In short, Ralph Bramlett was completely reinstated in his good opinion of himself, and it cannot be denied that Marjorie's note had done much toward bringing him to his habitual frame of mind once more. It was because he felt complacent that Glyde's appeal had interested him; it appealed, he told himself, to his common sense; and while it may be a surprise to some, it is nevertheless the

fact that this young man prided himself upon his common sense!

Now that he thought of it, he admitted that it really was quite strange that a young man of his stamp should not have given serious attention to such subjects. Glyde had spoken of him as one who, she thought, would like to become friends with Jesus Christ; the thought did not fill him with awe, but with a sense of eminent fitness. What more reasonable than to suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ would be pleased with his acquaintance? Oh, he did not put it quite so baldly as that, but the thought, analyzed, suggested almost condescension upon his part. He began seriously to consider whether some such step would not be the proper one to take next. Certainly it would sound very well indeed to have it said that Ralph Bramlett, who was supposed by some to have taken a step downward on account of the clerkship which he had accepted, had become deeply interested in religious matters; had, in fact, taken a decided stand. This would astonish and perhaps not a little discomfit some people; it would serve to show that the business relations which he had formed, instead of proving his ruin, had led him to a serious consideration of the most important business; not only a consideration, but a decision. Why should he not decide at once to unite with the church? His character was undoubtedly beyond reproach. He lived as entirely a Christian life to all appearance now, as did those of his ac-

quaintance who were church members. It is true that Christian people read the Bible he supposed, with a certain degree of regularity, and this he had not been in the habit of doing. But it was entirely proper, and he had no objections whatever to doing so. Moreover they prayed, with more or less frequency, and that too seemed to him a most suitable thing to do. When he was a little fellow he used to pray quite regularly; it was probably owing to his unfortunate environment that he had ever given up the habit. So far as the weekly prayer-meeting was concerned, he reflected with satisfaction that he knew many eminently respectable church members who evidently did not find it consistent with their other duties to attend, at least with any degree of regularity. Of course he could go occasionally; he thought he should quite like to do so. In short, while Estelle Douglass was giving an elaborate description of a fancy-dress entertainment of which she had heard, and explaining volubly how they might adapt it to their needs so as to make a sum of money for benevolent or missionary purposes, her companion was deliberately deciding to become forthwith interested in the subject of religion, and to unite himself, without much more delay, with the visible Church. This plan, besides appealing to his common sense, seemed to him a delicious piece of diplomacy to show Mrs. Edmonds and her set how utterly they were mistaken in him.

Was Ralph Bramlett then a hypocrite? Not in

the slightest degree. He was simply a self-deceived young man, who knew no more about the real claims of Jesus Christ, or of his power over the heart and conscience than did the veriest child. He honestly believed that for a moral, upright young man like himself, the one step needed in order for him to identify himself fully with all the religious movements of the day, was to unite with the church and adopt the forms of service which church people used. It seemed to him, as Glyde had said, a surprising thing that he had not taken this step before. He told himself that if he had thought about it seriously, he would undoubtedly have done so. And that he had not thought about it, was owing to the fact that he was surrounded by a class of people who gave little heed to such things and had made no attempt to press their claims upon him; so, after all, the delay was their fault, not his.

CHAPTER XVI.

AS OTHERS SEE US.

“Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel’s as ithers see us !”

NOTWITHSTANDING the injury which his companions had done this estimable young man by not urging him to the important step which he now contemplated, he could not seriously regret the delay; for he told himself that he could not have had a more opportune time than the present. He by no means used, in thinking it over, the words which would have honestly described his desire, which was to create a sensation; instead, he made use of a phrase which he had somewhere heard, about letting his light shine; it seemed an eminently appropriate idea; he had light, plenty of it, why not let it shine?

He interrupted Estelle’s description, with an apparently irrelevant remark: “Your little sister Glyde has developed in a new direction, has she not, of late?”

“Oh, yes,” said Estelle, wondering by what process of mental arithmetic he had added Glyde to the theme which they were supposed to be considering. “The child really blossomed out when she went on her trip with Uncle Anthony. I think

I never knew a girl to change so much in so short a time. I can't define the change, either; it eludes description; but it is perfectly palpable, nevertheless. How does she exhibit it to you?"

"I thought she seemed more seriously inclined than usual."

"Serious? Religiously do you mean? Has she been talking to you?" Estelle laughed as though this were a matter for amusement and also one which demanded apology. "Don't mind her, Ralph; it is something that will wear off. She fell in with a company of fanatics I think, while she was away; very queer people they must have been from the account she gives. She went to a meeting somewhere, down among the slums, I suppose, judging from the character of the people, and there she heard all sorts of queer ideas advanced. She is at an impressionable age, you know, and the whole thing evidently made a deep impression. We are very much surprised to see in what way New York life took hold of her; it is the last experience we should have expected, with Uncle Anthony for a companion; he is eminently practical. If Glyde were not so young and so easily influenced, I should feel quite worried about her, for of all fanaticisms, I think *religious* is the very worst. Do not you?"

Ralph, shielded by the darkness, curled his moustached lip very slightly. He did not call Glyde's words to him fanatical; on the contrary, he considered them not only sensible but reason-

able. He told himself that he had a much higher opinion of her religion than he had of Estelle's; then he assured himself that he must always have had a religious nature in order to have such matters impress him as they did. Perhaps he should really quite enjoy his change of base.

When he went to his room that evening, he took down the Bible which had been the gift of his Sunday-school teacher on his fifteenth birthday, and which had been opened only at rare intervals since, and looked at its pages with a certain degree of interest. This was part of the new life which he had resolved to commence. Where should he read? Why not at the very beginning? People who professed to use the Bible daily, should know it as a whole. The thought of turning to the life of Christ and making himself acquainted with the character which had so impressed Glyde occurred to him, but was promptly dismissed. He could not have told why he shrank from this,—he did not allow himself to realize that he did so; he simply explained to himself that the New Testament was for children and undeveloped young people, like Glyde Douglass; every ordinarily educated person of his years was more or less familiar with it; he remembered its stories perfectly. He would take the very first chapter of the Old Testament: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The majestic story spread itself before him, calling upon a thoughtful man to take in its stupendous simplic-

ity and depth; but very little attention did this reader pay to the words over which his eyes were roving. It is an actual fact that it had not deeply impressed itself upon him that it was important to give his entire mind to what he read. His thoughts if they had been written out would have been something like this: "I wonder what that immaculate Mrs. Edmonds would think, could she know how I am occupied just at this time? she believes that I have gone to the dogs because I have chosen to accept a salary which will help my father, instead of hanging around all winter doing nothing, waiting for something to come to me. It is not the position which I should have chosen, but it is the one evidently to which Providence assigned me." When he thought this, he felt religious in the extreme, and put away even from his memory all knowledge of the fact that his own obstinacy and carelessness had closed some doors which were apparently wide open. The first chapter of Genesis and the accompanying thoughts, moved on together.

" 'And God said let us make man in our image. after our likeness; ' and so far from this new business demoralizing me, as I believe my Lady Edmonds hopes it will, I am actually beginning a new life because of it! I wonder if Marjorie reads her Bible every day? Such a saint as her mother must have brought her up to these habits, I should think, though to be sure Marjorie has a mind of her own; the views of most other people do not affect her.

I fancy I know one who can influence her when he really sets about it. That little Glyde seemed to think that all Marjorie needed to bring her out as a church member was for me to take the lead. I shouldn't wonder if she were correct. I think I shall unite with the church at once; there is no use in waiting, after one's mind is made up. I believe the communion service in our church occurs on the first Sunday in the year; that is an interesting time at which to take a stand. I should like to have Marjorie join with me, but that would be too soon for her, perhaps; and on the whole, the effect may be better if I come first and alone; there might be some who would be foolish enough to think that I was influenced by her if we came together. I think I will go alone; if there are no others to join at that time, so much the better, as my example will be all the stronger." The chapter finished—and he ended it with the thought: "I hope some of those self-righteous persons who decided that because I tried to do the best I could for my family I was on the high-road to perdition, will have their eyes opened to see that there are thoughtful, conscientious people in the world besides themselves—" he closed the Bible and assumed the attitude of prayer. When, before, had he been on his knees? His mind went swiftly back to the time when his little sister Dora lay dying, and the minister asked them all to kneel while he prayed for her passing soul. He had knelt with the rest, but kept his eyes on his sister's face; and had

seen a strange light come into her eyes, and a heavenly smile bathe her features as though the angels about whom she talked had indeed come to get her; as a matter of fact, when the prayer was finished and they arose from their knees, it was found that Dora had gone away: Ralph had thought then that he never should forget that look, and the impressions which the entire scene left upon his heart; but he was barely sixteen at that time, and he had not thought of his little sister before, for years. One sentence of the minister's prayer came back to him as he knelt, and wondered what it would be proper to say. "Prepare us each for this solemn hour, when it shall come to us." The thought of death had startled him then; it startled him now; he did not want to be prepared for that "solemn hour;" he wanted to live; he intended to live; to be a successful business man—yes, and a successful Christian; to be respected, admired. He had always been considered an estimable young man, it was quite time that he was also an example for others in this direction. He had no objection whatever, so that it did not interfere with his success in life. Oh, he did not let that idea halt before him, so he could look at it and see what it really meant; it simply floated through his mind. It will be noted that he had yet to learn that people who are prepared for the solemn hour of death are the only ones who are ready to live. But all this was not praying. The kneeling man began to feel a certain sense of awe in the thought that

he was in the presence of the Lord, and preparing to speak to him. What words would be appropriate? What did he want? If he had but realized that he did not want anything which it would be wise to bring before the Lord Jesus Christ, the thought might have helped him. Instead, he began to feel that he must be naturally of a very reverent disposition, since the idea of prayer filled him with such a sense of awe. At last he decided, and began in an appropriate tone: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done;" and continued through to the majestic closing: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." Nothing, he assured himself, could be more proper than the Lord's own prayer which he had himself taught his disciples. That ought to voice all the needs of the human soul; and it was as familiar to him as his own name.

Alas for Ralph! the green parrot on its perch in the minister's study could have recited the words nearly as well as he, and would have had almost as full a sense of their deep spiritual meaning! "Thy kingdom come!" How little this young man cared for the Lord's kingdom! If his prayer had been answered then and there, and the kingdom had been set up on the earth, hardly anything could have interfered more entirely with his plans and hopes. How very far he was from desiring to do the Lord's will! Whenever that will was pleasant, convenient, in a line with his own

ideas and inclinations, why, then, of course ; but the moment the wills crossed, it must be Ralph Bramlett's which was to have the ascendancy. This was not only his wish but his intention, although he had never put it into words.

"More's the pity," if we would occasionally put our passing thoughts into bold words and study their spirit, they might teach us to know ourselves. Ralph Bramlett did not in the least understand that such was his trend of thought.

On the whole, he arose from his knees quite satisfied with himself. He had begun the new life ; he had read the Bible ; he had prayed. He had declined to give any promise to Glyde concerning these matters, and had not, when he left her, intended to give them a second thought ; so it was no "weak" girl's influence which had brought him to a decision ; it was his own superior judgment and will. This recollection gave him great pleasure.

Meantime, Mr. Maxwell's acquaintance with the Edmonds family had made rapid progress. Not apparently because of the planning of any of them, but by natural sequence. On the first evening following their walk together, when he and Marjorie met in the hall, it was of course entirely the proper thing to do, to ask particularly after her welfare, and as to whether the unusual exposure on the evening before had worked ill in any way. Of course, for Marjorie to have assumed the air of a stranger, after his extreme friendliness and

kindness, would have been ridiculous. So they presently found themselves chatting together as friends of some standing. Mr. Maxwell had a book in his hand, and explained to Marjorie that he had found a description of her glen; or else there was a remarkable degree of similarity between two choice portions of the world; and he challenged her to listen while he read.

This roused a discussion with regard to that glen, and some others, and led to a talk concerning that particular author, and other authors, and books in general. So that, when Mr. Maxwell, who had been invited to take a seat while he was reading his extract, arose to go, it came to pass that it was quite an hour later than when he stopped in the hall for kindly inquiries. He apologized for his intrusion, and Mrs. Edmonds met him cordially.

“Don’t apologize I beg; we have enjoyed the hour. Marjorie and I are often quite alone here at this time of the day; it is pleasant to have company. And to talk with a third person about the books we have been reading, is a refreshment to me. I come in contact with so few people in these days who seem to read books at all; at least, any that I care for.”

As she spoke, her daughter regarded her with a sort of tender surprise. Had her mother, then, been often lonely? They had lived such a pre-occupied and entirely satisfactory life together, she and Ralph, that the mother had perhaps been

sometimes almost forgotten. Oh, they had read many books together, she and her mother. Their winter afternoons were almost certain to be spent in this way; but when Ralph came, the books had been laid aside as a matter of course; and conversation and music had taken their place, with her; not with her mother, she was obliged to admit. Mrs. Edmonds did not sing; and Marjorie realized that their habits of late, hers and Ralph's, had been to go, early in the evening, to the piano, to turn over the music, and sing snatches of favorite songs, conversing together between times, generally in low tones, so as not to disturb the reading which was being carried on at the farther end of the room. Her mother always had beside her a book which was supposed to occupy her quiet moments; it really had not occurred to Marjorie until now that possibly at those times she felt alone. It was perhaps because she was grieved and penitent over this new idea that she accepted with such cordiality Mr. Maxwell's next kind offer of friendship. They had been speaking about a new book, one which was creating a sensation in the literary world. In the course of the next two or three days Mr. Maxwell announced that he had secured a copy of the book, and that if it would be entirely agreeable, he would like to read aloud from it on leisure evenings, while they worked. He confessed frankly that he had grown very weary of reading alone; was, in fact, "hungering and thirsting for an audience."

This was while Ralph Bramlett was still in New York, so Marjorie's evenings were entirely at her disposal; she hailed the proposition with gratitude even on her own account. She had so many things to think about, with which she began to have an instinctive feeling that her mother was not in sympathy, that she could not help thinking it would be a relief to seem to be occupied in listening to some one reading aloud, while at the same time she was at liberty to carry on her own train of thought. But Mr. Maxwell proved to be a delightful reader, and the book he had chosen was one calculated to fascinate a cultivated taste. By the time he was well into the story she had determined to leave her individual thinking for more convenient hours and give undivided attention to the book. They did not make very rapid progress with the story; it was surprising how many questions they had to stop to discuss, and how many arguments were carried on vigorously with regard to the writer's views, or style, or intentions. By degrees the entire plot of the book, not only as it had already appeared, but as they fancied it would develop, was eagerly discussed and improvements suggested, and, when a difference of opinion was expressed, each combatant argued with energy for his side. At first, Marjorie meant to listen, allowing her mother and Mr. Maxwell to do the arguing; but this was by no means so easy a task as she had supposed; she found that her own ideas were pronounced, and would insist on being brought to the

front. She found, also, that Mr. Maxwell's ideas often differed from hers, and that an argument between them could be spirited, with a keen play of wit on either side, and yet could be thoroughly enjoyable.

Very often during this war of ideas Mrs. Edmonds of choice dropped a little into the background and indulged in her own thoughts, which ran a little on this wise: "How is it possible that Marjorie can enjoy such conversations with a thoroughly cultivated man, and not feel how sharp is the contrast between him and Ralph Bramlett?"

But there is no accounting for the obtuseness of some young women under certain circumstances. During those days, Marjorie's loyal heart drew no pictures illustrating the difference between the two gentlemen. She enjoyed Mr. Maxwell; she was ready to heartily agree with her mother that he was refined and scholarly, and that the hours of reading he had given them were very pleasant, not only, but educational, in the best sense; and perhaps at the very moment her heart would be wondering how much longer Ralph meant to wait before writing. Sometimes she would ask herself if it could be possible that she had so hurt him by her manner that afternoon, that he was really afraid to write at all. If she could have been sure of that, she would have written to him even during those early days. When Ralph finally returned and the notes were exchanged, and the real break came, Mr. Maxwell became Marjorie's

greatest stronghold. He knew nothing of course of the fiery trial through which she was passing ; she could therefore sit quietly in his presence and seem to listen as before to his reading, and live all the time her separate life of self-concentrated pain, without tearing her mother's heart-strings by solitude. So she hailed the advent of another book when the first was finished, with such evident satisfaction as to deceive even her mother. Thus it came to pass that the readings became an almost nightly occurrence. If the reader noticed that Marjorie took little part in the discussions, he made no sign, but talked as well and with as keen a zest as before ; and, in truth, Mrs. Edmonds was a woman whose ideas were well worthy of attention and respect. What a curious revelation there would have been to these three if the secrets of hearts could have suddenly been laid bare before them ! Something like this would have been the result for each with surprised eyes to read.

Marjorie : " It is just a year ago to-night that we went to Hartwell together, and Ralph gave me his photograph taken in that new way ; and he said : ' Marjorie let us have our photographs taken every year for each other, until I am eighty ; after that, I suppose we will not care for fresh ones.' I wonder if it is possible that he does not think of any of those old times ! Oh, I must not think of them any more. I *must not* let poor mamma know that I am living in my past."

Mrs. Edmonds : " My poor darling ! If her

mother only dared to tell her how much she sympathizes with her! Every one of these evenings is an anniversary of something which now gives her pain. If I could be sure that the pain would last, and that I ought to give her up to him, I would humiliate myself, yes, crucify myself for her sake, and try to bring them together. I am persuaded that it would take but a word from me. He is simply sulking, and cannot get the consent of his pride to make the first advance; but oh, surely it cannot be that I ought!"

Mr. Maxwell: "She is paler than usual to-night; women with hearts must needs feel, even though the object which calls out those feelings is made of the merest putty. I must try to hold the mother's attention away from her to-night; I see no other way to help her—yet."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "BEST THING."

MATTERS were in about this shape when Glyde Douglass came one afternoon, to have a little visit with Marjorie. Glyde was a favorite not only with Marjorie but her mother. Mrs. Edmonds, who was always watching without seeming to, saw the brightening of her daughter's pale, quiet face as Glyde appeared, and pressed with earnestness her invitation to remain to tea, promising if she would, to make a certain kind of muffins of which the young people were especially fond. She was in the kitchen intent upon her hospitable task, and the two girls were alone in the pleasant back parlor. On the table lay the book which was being read aloud. Glyde picked it up and examined it with interest, from the fly leaf where Mr. Maxwell's name was written in his own hand to the few fine illustrations scattered through it, stopping here and there to read a sentence as a word caught her eye.

"Is this nice?" she asked, using her pet word which had to do duty for many unlike things. "How interesting it looks, doesn't it? Are you reading it, Marjorie? You and your mother have

good times together, reading books, don't you?" There was a wistful note in Glyde's voice; the home-life in this bit of a home was like a glimpse of paradise to her. Someway, the Douglass family had never been in the habit of having much home life.

"It is very good, I believe," Marjorie said indifferently. "At least mother likes it; and Mr. Maxwell considers it quite a masterpiece. It is unlike anything that I ever read. I have not decided what I think about it. It is a religious novel, Glyde; I never used to think that I could be made to care for religious novels."

"Why not?" asked Glyde quickly, wondering if possibly her opportunity might be coming. There were words that she wanted to speak to Marjorie, if only she could discover just the right time.

"Do you mean that you thought you would not be interested in them, because they had to do with religion?"

"N-o, not exactly that; but it has always seemed to me as though religion ought to have to do with true things; and as though fiction were not its realm. True religion, I mean; there is a sham kind which I despise in life, and in books."

"Ah, but a story, a good story, is just a picture of real life, I think," said Glyde eagerly; "and if that is so, religion couldn't be left out, Marjorie. For religion has to do with real life; *must* have, more or less, whether we want it to or not."

“Why must it?” asked Marjorie, amused. Like Ralph Bramlett, she had always thought of Glyde as a little girl; she found herself wondering how much the child could talk about such matters.

“Why, because,” said Glyde, with great earnestness, “life is intertwined with it. Not with religion, perhaps, either; I do not know that I can make myself clear; what I mean is, that life has to do with the facts which underlie religion; and *must* have. Why, all people sin, and suffer, and die, you know, Marjorie,—I was going to say that all people loved, but sometimes that does not seem so certain; but the other three cannot be denied, and religion, the religion which I am talking about, means a Saviour from sin, and right living, and eternal life; now, how can these be ignored in any history of human life? When one stops to think of it, one would suppose that such tremendous issues as these must have to do with all stories that are worth considering.”

“What do you know about suffering?” asked Marjorie, with sudden gravity. She felt, poor girl, that she had drunk the cup of trouble almost to its dregs; but what could this young creature understand as to the first syllable of its meaning?

“Not much, of course,” said Glyde, with sweet seriousness; “in the light of other people’s experiences I have never had any trouble worthy of the name. Yet, young girls have their troubles, Marjorie; and petty as they may seem to others, and to themselves afterwards, they are hard while

they last. One of the wonders about Jesus Christ is, that He seems able to sympathize with little, petty troubles as well as great ones." She was not accustomed to speaking of Him thus familiarly; the effort to do so made her face flush and her voice tremble a little.

Marjorie regarded her curiously, and recognized the subtle change which had been so noticeable to the Douglass family.

"You are growing into a woman, Glyde," she said; "I used to think you were only a little girl. Oh, yes, girls have their troubles; I remember that mine used to seem very large." She spoke as though her own girlhood were a state which had been put far into the past.

"So you have gotten where you like religious books?" she added, still regarding Glyde with the air of one who was trying to understand some new development. "You would enjoy this one, then. It is a pity you could not hear it read. Mr. Maxwell is an excellent reader, and is so entirely in sympathy with the chief character in the story, that he reads as though he were telling his own experience."

"Is Mr. Maxwell a Christian?" There was no mistaking the eagerness in the girl's tone, nor the interested light which suddenly flashed in her eyes.

Marjorie could not repress a slight laugh.

"Is there anything so very wonderful about that, Glyde?" she asked. "Your eyes shine like

stars. Yes, I suppose he is a Christian ; in fact, I know he is ; one of the very marked kind ; he puts his religion first, I fancy. Does that awaken your curiosity to see how he does it ? ”

“ It rests me,” said Glyde, with energy. “ Did you ever think, Marjorie, how very few Christian young men we have ? Almost none, indeed ; there are only three or four in our large church, and they are absent from home most of the time ; and when they are here,—well, they are not the kind of Christians I am talking about. But there are so very few. Isn’t it strange ? So many girls are church-members, and most of the boys seem not to have so much as thought of such things.”

“ How many of the girls have really thought of such things ? ” asked Marjorie cynically. “ Do you not suppose that most of them joined the church because others did, or because it seemed the proper thing to be done next ? Or somebody that they wanted to please, urged them to do so ? ”

“ I don’t know,” said Glyde sorrowfully ; “ I would not like to say so. One would not like to call in question the motives of others. I think we have acted very much that way ; all of us, perhaps ; I have, I know ; but, oh, Marjorie ! I don’t want to. I didn’t join the church simply because others did ; I joined because I meant it from my soul ; but I haven’t lived so, I know ; I have lived as though religion was a very secondary matter indeed to me. I want to be different ; and I want others to be different. I wish I knew how to

reach and help somebody. I would like to know this Mr. Maxwell, if he is the kind of Christian you think; they are so helpful, such people. I met one or two in New York; I had only a few minutes' conversation with them, but I cannot tell you how much they helped me!" Glyde made not the slightest attempt to analyze the feeling which led her to use the plural pronoun in speaking of her interview with Mr. Burwell.

But now she had embarrassed her audience. Marjorie had not had the least expectation of awakening so humble a confession. Heretofore her sarcastic criticisms in these directions had called forth only indignant protests, or the good-natured reminder that she was talking about something of which she knew nothing.

Glyde's tremulous voice and humble words were of another world than any which Marjorie knew. She had no reply ready and was meditating a change of subject, to muffins, or some other safe commonplace, when Glyde began again.

"I'll tell you what I wish, Marjorie: it isn't a new idea—I have thought about it a great deal all this week. I wish with all my soul that you were such a Christian as you could be, and as I think you surely would be if you gave your heart to Christ's guidance. You could help us all so much. You know you have influence among those who need helping in this very direction. They are used to following your lead, and are glad to do so; you could almost certainly lead them toward Christ.

"Oh, dear Marjorie, won't you think about this matter seriously? It seems to me I have thought of little else since the idea first came to me; every time I have prayed I have asked the Lord to let me speak some word which might possibly influence you. Not that I wanted to be the one to do it. I was willing that anybody should do it, if you would only listen, and take hold of the matter with the energy which you give to other things."

Marjorie's embarrassment deepened; she was as unaccustomed to direct personal appeals upon this subject, as Glyde was to leading in a religious conversation. She was deeply moved, too, for almost the first time in her life. As she watched Glyde's expressive face and thought of what she had known of her heretofore, she told herself that here was a genuine experience. Glyde knew what she was talking about, and meant what she said. And behold she was appealing to *her*, Marjorie Edmonds, for help in a direction of which she knew nothing! Glyde waited for her answer; it was evident that she expected one, and Marjorie did not know how to frame it.

"You dear little girl!" she said at last, bending over and kissing the flushed cheek, "I did not mean you when I made my sweeping, and, I presume, ill-natured remarks about a certain class of church members. I believe in you, and in a few other people. But about myself; as for my helping others, you are wofully mistaken in me; my influence is a mere name. The girls do not

really follow my lead in any matter of importance, and never did. It is well perhaps that it is so, for no one could be farther away from leading them in the right direction than I am. And I never felt my influence over others less, or felt less inclined to exert any influence than at this time. I do not want any one to follow me, I am sure; I am too far from being satisfied with the road I am traveling, to desire any person to take it with me."

"But, Marjorie, what I want is to have you follow Christ, and follow him so closely that the rest of us who are not so strong as you, will be led to follow in your way. It isn't all a name, Marjorie, just joining the church and nothing more. Believe me, there is a reality in it, and a help such as nothing else can afford. If you really are dissatisfied with yourself I am sure you will find it the very thing you need. But I confess frankly that I was not thinking so much of your needs as of those of others. You seem so self-reliant always, that I cannot realize your needs as well as I can our own. It is the same with Ralph. I was saying something of this kind to him the other night. If you and he, I told him, were only Christians, such Christians as you could be; it seems to me that you could take all our circle for Christ this winter; surely that would be an ambition worth living for!"

She coupled their names as a matter of course. This young girl who was really thinking of more important matters than a possible coldness between the two, had forgotten, if she had ever heard,

shrewd surmises of trouble between them. No one, save the parties immediately concerned, knew of a certainty that such was the case. It happened that this season, usually so gay, was one of marked quiet in their circle, owing to the fact that there was illness of a more or less serious character in the families of two of their number; and also because several of the young people, prominent in their set, were away for the holidays. Moreover, Ralph Bramlett had not found his new position the mere sinecure that the commercial traveler had almost led him to expect. There was plenty of work to be done, and some of it of such a character as to require over-hours and much puzzling to straighten out. It came to pass that more often than otherwise instead of coming home on the six, or even the five-o'clock express, as his employers so often did, he was likely to have to wait for the seven-thirty accommodation, and, cold, tired and cross, make his way out to the Bramlett farm, supperless, some time after the hour when evening entertainments generally commenced. Those who knew these facts and knew no others, saw abundant reason why both Ralph and Marjorie were absent from the few entertainments which the more courageous planned at this time. Even Estelle Douglass was not sure that Ralph had not called upon Marjorie a number of times during the past weeks.

It was impossible for Marjorie not to change color under the sound of the familiar words which she

had not heard for so long, and which were once of almost hourly repetition, "You and Ralph." She looked at Glyde closely with a shade of suspicion. Had she grown into a shrewd young woman, and was she trying in this way to win confidences which were not intended for her? No, Glyde's face was pure, and her glance free and sweet; to act a part, however small, would be foreign to her nature. Her whole heart was evidently absorbed in matters far removed from such as those.

"What did he say?" Marjorie asked, under the power of the thought that she must say something; and feeling, too, that it would be a comfort to hear from Ralph even at second-hand.

"Oh, not much; he is skillful at evasion, you know, when he wishes to be. I had very little time to talk with him. It was the night of the Stoddard lecture; he came for Estelle,—I suppose because he knew you were not at home; and it was only while we were waiting for her to come, that I had any chance."

Marjorie gave a little start. He had taken Estelle to the lecture then! She had not heard of this before. She had been in town that day on a shopping excursion; had chosen that particular day, indeed, because of the lecture, and the thought that, for almost the first time in years, when a lecture of importance was to be given, Ralph would not ask her to enjoy it with him. She had not been able to decide to accept Mr. Maxwell's invitation to her mother and herself to keep him company, so she had persuaded

that watchful mother that no other day would do for their important shopping in town. She had been tardy with her shopping, and they had come out on the accommodation. Marjorie told herself it was because they had been necessarily delayed, but in her heart she knew that a central reason for it was because she had heard that Ralph often took that train. He did not take it that evening, though she watched furtively every muffled traveler until the train was well out of the station. She thought of him as possibly detained for a still later train. For some reason it had not occurred to her that he would be at the lecture with Estelle Douglass by his side.

“I do not think Ralph is interested,” continued Glyde, humbly. “I do not suppose my words to him did any good; I have thought since that perhaps they even did harm. But how easily you could influence him. He is always so ready to join you in any way. How can you bear not to use your power? He needs to be influenced now, I think, more than ever before.”

By this time the muffins were ready, and there came a summons to tea, much to Marjorie’s relief. She felt that she could not have borne another word.

To the surprise of the girls, Mr. Maxwell made a fourth at the table. “Your mother tempted me,” he explained gaily to Marjorie. “She was taking up the muffins just as I brought the mail. Of course I could not resist the temptation to say

that they looked like my mother's ; what son could ? And she was cruel enough to consider it a hint that I wanted some of them ; though I give you my word of honor that no such thought was in my mind."

He was a delightful addition to the family party. Glyde, who was at first inclined to be half afraid of him, frankly admitted this, when the tea was over. At all times a good talker, he exerted himself on this occasion apparently to entertain them all. In his heart was a desire to relieve Marjorie from the burden of talking. She looked so wan and worn that he could not help feeling a great pity for her.

One significant question he asked Glyde, at least it became significant because of her answer. "It was your first visit to New York, I believe ? What was the best thing you brought away from there ?" The questioned was awakened by a passing curiosity to know how this young creature rated life ; what would she regard as a "best thing ?" Her quiet, serious answer took him by surprise.

"A fuller knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. I knew Him before ; but not in the way in which I met Him there, nor as I have realized His presence since.

"Then you brought away the best knowledge that life has," he said heartily. "It is not possible to improve upon that, except in degree, though you should live a hundred years. But what a place in which to find such a pearl ! Mrs. Edmonds, does

not such testimony go far toward redeeming the reputation of New York? Who is it that says 'We find what we are looking for?'

It was found to be a not difficult task to persuade Glyde to remain for the evening reading. She confessed her hearty desire to do so; and explained that she had looked forward to an evening alone; for the girls were going out, and as father was not well, mother would be likely to spend her evening in his room ministering to him. No, in answer to Mrs. Edmonds's careful inquiry, they would not be troubled by her late coming; she had prepared them for that by saying that she should perhaps stop at Auntie Bennett's for the evening.

"Auntie Bennett" was their next-door neighbor.

They presently settled themselves for an hour of enjoyment. Marjorie brought out her work, and Glyde established herself in a corner of the sofa beside her, with a view to helping, and the reading began. One third of the book had already been read aloud, but Mr. Maxwell showed himself to be an excellent synoptist, and Glyde was a good questioner, so she presently had a very fair idea of the opening chapters, and was prepared to listen to a somewhat elaborate description of some New Year's calls.

"They had a better time with New Year's calls than I do," she announced, in one of the pauses for conversation which made these readings so delightful. "I always dread New Year's day."

"Are calls from your friends particularly dis-

agreeable to you on that day?" Mr. Maxwell asked.

"Oh, I do not receive; not formally. I have almost no gentlemen friends. My sisters nearly always receive with some of their particular friends, and the callers we have are my father's business acquaintances, who keep up the formality more for old time's sake, than because they particularly enjoy it, I think. Men call whom my father rarely sees at any other time, and does not particularly care to see, I fancy; but they sit and talk, ever so long, and drink coffee, which I have to serve, and even *smoke*, some of them. I have to be in attendance all the time, to wait on them; the most of them pay not the slightest attention to me; still there are a few who do notice me, and then I wish they wouldn't. I am always glad when the day is over."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"ISN'T IT FUN?"

THE talk thus started, interrupted the progress of the book for some time. Glyde, being drawn out by questions from Marjorie, gave somewhat in detail her experiences of a year before, and moved them all to laughter by her vivid account.

Marjorie added at its close, with some vehemence, that she also hated New Year's calls, and hoped that her mother would not consider it necessary that they should be victimized this year.

"Well, now," said Mr. Maxwell, "my experience differs from yours. I like the old-time custom well carried out; provided I can have the arranging of my 'program,' do not know any other day which I enjoy better than the first one of the year."

"Do you always make calls?" asked Glyde, and her tone expressed surprise.

"Always," he said, smiling. "May I know why you put that exclamation point into your voice?"

Glyde laughed and blushed. "I did not know there was an exclamation point in it," she said, "but I confess that I felt surprised. You did not impress me like the kind of man who makes New Year's calls."

They could not help laughing over this ; and Mr. Maxwell declared his inability to decide whether he had been complimented or otherwise. Then he said :

“I wonder if I could not secure some allies for my calls this year? I do not know many people in this region, and my enjoyment will be limited, I fear, unless I can take friends with me. How would it do for you three ladies to depart from your usual custom, and make calls with me?”

Glyde's eyes opened wide.

“Why, Mr. Maxwell! ladies do not make New Year's calls, do they?”

“Yes indeed. I have had the pleasure of taking ladies with me on several occasions. You see the calls which I plan are not of the conventional order. We take our refreshments with us, even to the coffee, Miss Douglass, though I own that sometimes the ladies have to pour it.”

“Oh!” said Glyde, her eyes growing bright, “I begin to understand; you call upon poor people; those who have no pleasant holiday save the part you bring them. Is that it? Must not that be lovely, Marjorie? Oh I *wish* I do could it! I would like to go and call on some of those girls I saw in that meeting in New York, and take them some pretty things, and have some good talks with them.”

“New York is too far away,” said Mr. Maxwell. “Will not, ‘some girls’ in your own town do?”

In short, for the next half-hour the book was

practically abandoned while they discussed with steadily growing interest this new plan. By the time they were ready to return to the story, it had been decided that the three ladies should give themselves up for the entire New Year afternoon to Mr. Maxwell's directions and guidance. It was evident that he knew how to guide them. To Glyde's exclamation that there were no people in her own town like the girls she meant, he had replied that if a town having ten or twelve thousand people in it could be found who would not be the better for the sort of calls he was planning, then that town must be ready for the millennium. After which he had instanced so many of whom even Mrs. Edmonds had never heard, that she frankly admitted his superior knowledge in certain lines at least, of the town where she had spent twenty years of her life, and he not so many weeks.

New Year's day dawned in glorious beauty, and was welcomed by Glyde Douglass for the first time since her childhood with a certain gleefulness. Her father not being so well as usual this winter, had determined; weeks before this, not to receive his old acquaintances, and Glyde was therefore at liberty. The girls who had been invited to join some new friends of theirs, the McAllisters, and were expecting an especially exciting day, had time only to question Glyde a little as to her plans, and to exclaim over the oddity of it all, and over Majorie's willingness to do anything out of

the common order, however “pokey” it might be; but Mrs. Douglass entered with some zest into the preparations. The Douglass family were, it is true, what they called poor, but they were ready to make unlimited cake and sandwiches for almost any occasion; so Glyde’s basket was well stocked; and it was with very bright eyes indeed that precisely at one o’clock she opened the front door of their home, in response to Mr. Maxwell’s ring and found a handsome sleigh awaiting her with Mrs. Edmonds in the back seat and Marjorie holding the horses.

“Miss Edmonds was good enough to manage my horses during several stops which we had to make,” explained Mr. Maxwell, as Glyde wondered whether she was to have the honor of the back seat “and therefore it became necessary to separate her from her mother. I will leave you and she to decide who is to have the pleasure of sitting with Mrs. Edmonds now.”

“Glyde,” said Marjorie, “would you be afraid to hold these animals while Mr. Maxwell stops at the express office, and the market, and the confectioner’s, and a dozen other places?”

“I never held horses,” said Glyde, her eyes dancing, “but I think I could.”

“Then that settles it; I shall keep my place, and lend my mother to you; because Mr. Maxwell stops at these places or some other, every few minutes, and my mother’s neck, at least, is much too precious to admit of any aid from

novices. I have held horses before, and I rather enjoy holding these."

There was a sparkle in her eyes which her mother had not seen for weeks; she looked almost like her own bright self at that moment.

They were off like the wind in a few seconds more. As they passed the McAllister home, where there was a temporary lull from the stream of callers, Estelle Douglass, standing by the window, exclaimed. "Isn't that a splendid turnout! I declare, if that isn't Mrs. Edmonds's lodger, and Marjorie sitting by his side as erect as a princess! I really do not know now but that is getting to be a flirtation. Somebody ought to warn Ralph Bramlett. He is so busy nowadays, poor fellow, that he doesn't have time to look after her; and he doesn't drive such horses as those, either."

Entirely oblivious of the eager tongues which, thus started, were used for some time in discussing their affairs, the sleighing party went merrily on its way. Mrs. Edmonds was right in thinking that her daughter seemed more like herself, but she would have been almost sad over it, perhaps, had she understood how much effort of will there was about the matter. These holiday seasons were times of trial to Marjorie, such as it would have been hardly possible, for one not in full sympathy with her, to appreciate. Christmas and New Year's days and all the days between had been so distinctly associated with Ralph Bramlett as far back as her memory reached, that to arrive at such a season

with all association entirely cut off, had about it an element of bewilderment. Christmas day had been more endurable because she had learned incidentally that Ralph had been suddenly sent away on important business for his firm, two days before the holiday season opened; but he had returned, and the same busy agents who are sure, in towns of this size, or indeed of almost any size, to report in certain sets the doing of others, informed her that he intended to make calls as usual. It was this fact more than any other which had made Marjorie set her face like a flint against keeping open house on that day. Ralph would not call, of course; it would be almost insulting in him after ignoring her for so long, to come on a day when any one who had a bowing acquaintance with her was at liberty to call. Nor could she decide to sit smiling and talking with other young men, knowing that Ralph was smiling and talking with perhaps Estelle Douglass at the moment; making it apparent at last to everybody, that he was not on calling terms with her. This might be avoided at least a little longer by letting it be distinctly known that their home was not open to guests on New Year's day. This she had caused to be made known. Her next decision had been that she would not sit moping at home; for her mother's sake she would rouse herself and do something to make the day pass brightly. Because her heart ached, was no reason why she should selfishly condemn her mother to loneliness and silence. Therefore she

had received Mr. Maxwell's proposition with interest and entered into it with a stern determination to be herself in every respect, so far as outward appearance went. She succeeded remarkably well. The clear frosty air was exhilarating, and Marjorie, always fond of horses, liked to whirl along the streets holding these splendid specimens in with skillful hands. Not a little to her surprise, she also enjoyed the call which they presently made. It was upon a teacher, old and worn, who with his old bent wife occupied two rooms in a large boarding-house, and did what they meekly called "light housekeeping." Mr. Maxwell, it appeared, knew that their housekeeping was very "light" indeed. That their suppers consisted often of crackers and tea, and their breakfasts of bread without butter,—and tea, because they had, oh, such a tiny income to depend upon, and when illness, or accident, or the utter giving way of some long mended article of clothing necessitated an extra expenditure, the butterless bread and the very weak tea followed as a matter of dollars and cents, until they could make up the extra sum. Think what it must have been to set out the little round table for such a couple, and lade it with such luxuries as turkey, and cranberry sauce, and delicious home-made bread, and butter which smelled of June roses, and pie, and cake, and cheese, and fragrant tea, and many another dainty, the like of which the old teacher and his old wife had not seen for many a day. Not only a dinner for

this New Year's day but enough to crowd the meek little cupboard in the corner with dainties to last them well into the month. It was such a delight as even Mrs. Edmonds had never before experienced. Then what a rare pleasure it was to hear this old couple talk! Glyde Douglass watched, and listened to them almost with awe. How old they were! How white were their hairs! Yet they were refined and cultivated and sweet and bright. The old Professor greeted Mr. Maxwell like some beloved pupil of his earlier days, called him "My dear boy," yet talked with him about the latest deliverances in science, and the recent paper on Anthropology with the keen relish of a man who kept in touch with the present, and knew that his views would be treated with respect. And the little bent woman with her white satin hair and her dimming eyes, and her years fast hastening toward fourscore, had yet her eager interests. Had they heard the latest news from "our mission" in Syria? and wasn't it blessed that, in that land of all others, the Name above every name was beginning to draw the people? Glyde, listening to her, learned more about the progress of the cause of Christ in that far-away portion of the earth than she had ever known before. While they listened, they worked, she and Marjorie, making everything ready for the feast which the two were to have when they were gone; putting away the extra packages of tea, sugar and other extras which Mr. Maxwell had marked for them.

“Isn't it fun?” whispered Glyde, while Mr. Maxwell replied with respectful courtesy to the old Professor, and Mrs. Edmonds listened thoughtfully and interestedly to what the little wife was telling her. “Isn't it fun? And isn't it grand in him to think of such fun as this?” And Marjorie, her eyes bright with real interest, acknowledged that it was. When all was ready, they gathered round the fire which Mr. Maxwell had replenished royally, for he knew that a coal wagon was following in his train, and kneeling, the old man prayed such a prayer as the patriarch Jacob might have made “leaning on his staff”; only this Jacob never would have said: “Few and evil have my days been”; his heart seemed overflowing with gratitude and good cheer; and the little old wife, suddenly reached forth a trembling hand and placed it tenderly on the head of Marjorie who was kneeling nearest her, and whispered low, “Bless the child even with a father's blessing.” Did her sweet fading blue eyes discern by the light of another world than this, that Marjorie was in special need of a blessing?

“It is the nicest time I ever had,” said Glyde, when they had shaken hands all around and were in the sleigh again. “Mr. Maxwell, I do not in the least wonder that you like to make New Year calls, if this is a specimen of your kind.”

But they were not all like this. The fourth call was in quite another part of the town, where the factory tenement houses were. Mr. Maxwell

knocked twice, tried the door, then said: "I think they must all be away from home." But at that moment a little curly head appeared at the window and a piping voice called out: "We're locked in. Look up high and you'll see the key." Sure enough, dangling above their heads was a small key attached to a string. Mr. Maxwell reached for it, opened the door, and entered with his party. A small room with a bed in one corner, an old table in another, a broken stove where was no fire, and children everywhere; five of them. The oldest, who had given directions about the door, stood and stared curiously at her visitors; the others ran and hid behind the rickety table and the broken chair.

"Well, Marietta," said Mr. Maxwell cheerily, "Are you housekeeper and nurse to-day, as usual? Where is your mother? I thought she would be at home. Isn't this a holiday at the mill?"

"Yes, sir; but ma went to wash for Mis' Wheelock; she broke her leg and can't wash; and she promised ma some old clothes and a bag of meal if she would come; and ma says she's got to do extra work to pay for the doctor's bill and things, when Jimmie was sick."

"The idea!" said Mrs. Edmonds. "A mother with five little children leaving them alone and going out to wash!"

"On New Year's day at that," said Mr. Maxwell. "This is her extra, you understand; a sort of holiday entertainment; on ordinary days she works in the mill from six in the morning until six at night."

This little girl is the woman in charge during her mother's absence. Was she afraid to let you have a fire, Marietta?"

"Yes, sir; the stove is broke so, she thought it wouldn't be safe; the baby he tears around the stove; and Jimmie ain't much better, besides we ain't got much coal; we are going to have a fire when mother gets home, and some potatoes; we ain't had our dinner yet."

The ladies exclaimed over this; such a condition of things was a revelation to them, but Mr. Maxwell seemed to have heard of such before. "This family belongs to the class that we occasionally hear of," he said to Mrs. Edmonds, "called 'the deserving poor.' The mother is a widow, her husband was killed last fall by an accident at the mills, and she is trying to support her five children and pay doctor's bills and funeral expenses. I am at a loss whether to give the children their treat, or set the basket out of their reach somewhere, and let the mother have the pleasure of ministering to them herself. What do you think?"

It was Glyde who answered, all her heart in her eyes. "Oh, Mr. Maxwell, I know how to plan it. Couldn't you let me stay and clear up this room a little and put the children in order, and set the table, and make things a little bit home-like for the mother's coming? I should like to do it ever so much. I have some toys and picture-books for the children, and some fresh aprons; I could make them look so nice in their mother's eyes. And

you could call for me on your return, could you not?”

Mr. Maxwell's eyes were almost as bright as the girl's. “I could, certainly,” he said, “if you are sure you want to be left here. It is a dreary sort of place for a young lady. Mrs. Edmonds, what do you advise?”

“Why, if there could be a fire,” said that lady, doubtfully, “and Glyde is willing, of course it would be a beautiful thing to do, but I should not like to have her stay in the cold.”

“Oh, there must be a fire,” he said gayly, “I will manage that part, if Miss Douglass will engage to keep Jimmie and the baby away from the stove. Marietta, where do you keep your coal? I'm going to make a fire, and this lady will stay awhile and help you watch it. Tell your mother that the coal-closet will be filled to the brim before night.” As he spoke, he threw off the heavy cape of his overcoat and set to work about the old stove, with such skill that in a very few minutes a brisk fire was crackling; and the children, whose noses were blue with cold, despite the sunshine from the one window which the mother had counted upon for warming them, began to creep out from their hiding-places and crow and gurgle over the sense of cheer and warmth.

“She really enjoyed the thought of staying to help them;” Mrs. Edmonds said of Glyde, as the sleigh sped away without her. “Did you see how bright her face was over the thought of the changes

she could make? It was a beautiful thing to do. Some girls would not have been willing to sacrifice themselves in that way. Glyde is very fond of sleigh-riding, too, and gets extremely little of it. Her two elder sisters have all the extras in that home."

"She can make changes," said Mr. Maxwell. "I have a sufficiently vivid imagination to be able to foresee what a difference a little soap and water will make there, to say nothing of a few aprons; I think she spoke of aprons? It is fascinating work. I confess I do not wonder that it caught her. Nevertheless, it is true, as you say, that some young women would not have been so caught. Do you remember that Miss Douglass told us the other night that the best thing she had brought away from New York was a more intimate acquaintance with Jesus Christ? I was struck with her words. She shows marks of the intimacy."

Marjorie said no word. In her heart she wondered why Glyde had done this thing. There was not dire necessity for it; the children were as well off as they were on most days, probably, and would be again. She could not have done it; not that she wanted to ride, or cared for the ride; she simply *could not* have brought herself to the effort. Once she could; but not now. She did not want anything. Was her heart dead? So that she cared not for her own pleasure, nor for the comfort of others? If she had that "intimate acquaintance" of which Mr. Maxwell spoke, would it make a difference with her?

CHAPTER XIX.

"YOU PRAY."

THEIR next call was at a very different place. A speck of a home; part of a tenement house, but the part that they entered looking very unlike the rest. The doorstep was clean, the coarse white curtains at the windows were clean, and a pot of geraniums in the window bloomed as though they did it for very delight in life. The small room was in perfect order, and a bright fire glowed in the bit of a cook-stove. The furnishings were very few and plain. The only easy-chair the room contained, was drawn close to the front window, and in it sat a woman of middle age, who smiled on them as they entered, in response to her invitation, but made no effort to rise.

"I'm glad enough to see you," she said, holding out her hand to Mr. Maxwell. "I've been thinking you would remember me, ever since you told me that you sometimes made New Year's calls. Oh, yes, I'm quite alone. Jim couldn't take a holiday; a boy who has a helpless mother to support, cannot stop for holidays; he managed to find some overwork, for which he will get extra pay; he went off as gay as a lark this morning, telling

me he would have an extra supper to-night in honor of New Year's. There never was such a boy, ma'am, as my Jim." This, to Mrs. Edmonds, who had been duly introduced and seated. In response to some kindly question, the mother was glad to go on.

"Yes, he's my only one. I buried the others when they were babies; but Jim lived; and what I should have done without him, I can't even guess; it makes me tremble sometimes, merely to think of it. You see, ma'am, I'm a cripple. I have to be lifted from the bed to the chair, and from the chair back to the bed again. Just as much trouble as a baby would be. It is going on four years since I've taken a step. It's rheumatism, ma'am, and taking cold, being exposed, you know, to all sorts of weather. I'm a widow. Yes, I've seen hard times. My husband was unfortunate; as good-hearted a man as ever lived, and a skillful workman if he could have let the drink alone; but he couldn't; the temptations were too much for him. He worked for Snyder and Co., the big distillery men, and the sight and smell of the stuff seemed to get into his very bones. There were a few years when I lived in mortal terror lest my Jim should follow his father; but he didn't; he's as good as gold, and I have everything to be thankful for. He fixes me up like this every morning before he goes away; and here I sit until he gets back at night. Jane, next door, comes in at noon and gives me my bit of dinner, and she fixes it

most as nice as Jim could ; she works near by, so she can run home at noon, but Jim doesn't ; she's a good girl as ever was ; and couldn't be kinder to me if I was her mother. You see, she and Jim are going to get married if they ever can, poor things ; but I don't see how they ever can, while I'm alive ; and yet they do every blessed thing they can to keep me here, both of them. Yes, I don't deny that I get pretty lonesome before six o'clock sometimes ; if I could read a little, it would be different ; but my eyes are pretty well used up ; the trouble settled in them one time, and I liked to have lost them both ; they won't read, and they won't sew ; but that last is of no consequence, for my hands are so twisted that I couldn't hold the work ; still, my eyes are a good deal of use, for I can see the folks passing ; and I can watch the sun setting. We have beautiful sunsets out of this window. Oh, I've lots of blessings. Isn't it a comfort to be kept so clean and neat all the while ? I was a master hand for cleaning, when I could get around, and Jim declares I shan't pine for soap and water, anyhow. And Sundays, Jim reads to me all the morning ; and Jane she comes, in the afternoon, and she reads some, and sings, she and Jim sing beautiful ; and we have a bit of tea together ; oh, Sunday is just heaven ! I have to live all the week on the reading I get Sundays." She glanced at the little table where lay a book and two papers. " Jim brought me them this morning ; he thought Jane would be at home to-day,

and I could have some reading for New Year's, but he hadn't been gone an hour when she came to tell me that she had got a chance to earn an extra dollar; and away she went; she don't let no extra dollars slip through her fingers; she's too eager to help Jim for that."

It was a phase of life utterly unknown to Marjorie. This clean bright elderly woman sitting in her chair from which she could not move, counting her mercies, and rejoicing over "Jim and Jane." As Marjorie thought of them and of the pleasant times they must have together caring for the grateful mother, she felt that she could almost envy them; the tears actually started in her eyes, and she moved toward the other window, to hide her feelings.

"Miss Edmonds," said Mr. Maxwell, "will you help me unpack this basket and arrange the goods in Mrs. Baxter's cupboard?" Marjorie went at once, and busied herself with the packages. Her mother was still talking with the crippled woman. She came over to Mr. Maxwell presently, smiling as she spoke:

"I believe I have caught Glyde's disease. I would like to stay here a little while and read to this poor woman. Don't you think she has a letter from her sister in Scotland; the postman brought it this morning, and she is waiting for evening and 'Jim,' or 'Jane,' in order to hear it! Have you another errand which you and Marjorie could do, while I read that letter and a scrap or two

from the paper, and a few verses from the 'book'? That is the way she speaks of the Bible. 'Jim always reads a few verses from the book,' she says; 'before he puts me to bed.' "

Mr. Maxwell signified his entire willingness to carry out his part of the programme, and of course there was nothing for Marjorie but assent. She was, however, not disturbed, but the rather, amused by this turn of affairs.

"Is there not some old woman or baby with whom you can leave me?' she asked, laughing, as they drove away "then you might take your drive in peace and quietness."

"What if we should take the drive first?" he asked. "I have only one more call on my list; we shall probably be detained there but a moment, and I am afraid the letter from Scotland will not have been read by the time we could return. I am disposed, if you do not object, to drive out on the foundry road for a mile or two. The sleighing is exceptionally good on that road, and Selim and his friend are impatient for one real spin."

It was a regular "spin." His own fine horse was well mated, and being allowed free rein, they fairly flew over the road. The sleighing was, as Mr. Maxwell had said, superb, and despite her belief that her heart was dead, Marjorie could not help enjoying the exhilarating motion. It was when they were on the return trip that the blood flowed in unnatural waves into her face and then receded, for there passed them, also making rapid speed, a

single sleigh in which were seated Ralph Bramlett and Estelle Douglass. Ralph had departed from his usual custom, then, and instead of making New Year's calls was giving the day to Estelle. A sudden conviction came to Marjorie that the two were engaged; and with it the feeling that if this were so, she ought not to even think of Ralph any more. She could not know, of course, that Estelle instead of taking a sleigh ride should have been at that moment in the McAllisters' parlors receiving calls; nor that she had said to Ralph who came in his sleigh to call, that she was "just dying" for a breath of fresh air, the rooms had been so crowded and so over-heated all day. Didn't he want to take her a few rods up the road until she could get her breath?

Now Ralph had determined in his own strong mind that the very next call he made should be upon Marjorie Edmonds. Also that he would act as though he supposed of course that she was receiving, as usual; and perhaps he would make a formal call, just as any gentleman of slight acquaintance with her might do; he would be guided by circumstances. Having decided while he was at the McAllisters' upon this sudden course of action, he chafed under the delay involved in taking Estelle for that breath of fresh air; but he could not well refuse a point-blank request of the kind. And then, they had passed Selim and his friend rushing over the ground, with Mr. Maxwell and Marjorie. This was Estelle's opportunity.

"Upon my word! matters are really getting serious in that direction. What do you mean, Ralph, by allowing it? Glyde says the Edmonds lodger spends all his evenings with the family, reading aloud, and visiting; he even takes tea there very frequently. Glyde is cultivating an intimacy with Marjorie since she came home, and is always meeting Mr. Maxwell. She was to drive with them to-day; she and the mother Edmonds, for appearance's sake I suppose; but they have done something with both of their companions and are whirling along quite alone. They have been out since noon. I must say that if people did not know that you and Marjorie belonged to each other, it would look like a serious matter. As it is, it looks queer. Do you honestly enjoy such goings on? Excuse my asking the question; we are friends of such long standing."

Ralph was white to his lips, but his voice was perfectly steady. "You have an alarming way of taking things for granted, Estelle. Why should people suppose that they know so much about my affairs? I have never taken them into confidence. As a matter of fact, Mr. Maxwell is at liberty to take Marjorie Edmonds for as many drives as he pleases; I mean so far as I am concerned. I never meant to be selfish in my friendships. I might as well say I did not like to have you ride out with your friends, as to object to her doing it. Once for all, Estelle, Marjorie Edmonds is on exactly the

same footing with me as are my other old friends; and she is nothing more."

"I am very glad," said Estelle, with so much feeling in her voice that he could not doubt it. "Glad for your sake, I mean. Forgive me, Ralph, for saying so; I might have known that you were man enough to look after your own interests; but I felt so sure, from things that Glyde has told me, and from what I have seen, and heard myself, that Marjorie was getting very deeply interested in Mr. Maxwell, that I feared, I really did, that there was trouble in store for you."

Ralph laughed, a harsh unmusical laugh, and begged her not to borrow any trouble on his account.

But all this, of course, Marjorie did not know. She was, at that moment, being helped from the sleigh in front of one of the dreariest tenement houses at which they had stopped that day.

"I am very much interested in the woman I am going to take you to see," Mr. Maxwell had told her as they drove. "She is a young wife, and an unhappy one. She married a poor victim of Snyder, Snyder and Co.'s business. Married him not knowing how deeply he drank, I believe; and has learned it since, to her terror and horror. He is one of the cruel kind, when he is intoxicated; has actually kicked her more than once! and she is a slight, frail creature. It makes my blood boil when I think of what she has suffered already from that man; and what she must suffer if she lives. The last time I saw her she was ill with a

violent cold; I could not help thinking that perhaps that was to be her way out of the tragedy which she has made of life; but I do not know; those frail creatures sometimes live and suffer.” Will you give her some of those oranges you brought, Miss Edmonds? I have a basket of nourishing food for her; she looks to me as though she might be quietly and systematically starving herself.” Then they had knocked at the dreary door again and again, receiving no reply. Mr. Maxwell looked above and around him for a key. “This cannot be another case of locking in, I should think,” he said, “for she and her worthless husband live alone. I should like to lock him in and leave him until he acquired some sense, but I am afraid she would not resort to any such measures. Miss Edmonds, I am going to open this door; it is not locked, and I have a sort of presentiment that something may be wrong.” Saying which, he turned the knob and as the door swung open there was revealed to them the face of a figure on the bed, who seemed to Marjorie to be all eyes. “I said ‘come in,’” she explained, “but I could not speak loud enough.” Even this brief explanation was given with difficulty, the speaker stopping again and again, and panting for breath. Mr. Maxwell looked inexpressibly shocked.

“You are suffering very much;” he said. “How can we help you. Are you alone?”

She nodded her head; explaining, again with great difficulty that her neighbor on the left was

kind, and often looked in to help her, but to-day she was gone away and the folks on the right didn't speak to her. Then, gathering all her strength she put it into an earnest question, "Could you find my Jack? I don't want anything else; I haven't seen him in four days; and I must see him again before——" She did not finish her sentence; it was only too evident what she meant.

"I will try;" said Mr. Maxwell, "and I will bring you a doctor, right away; you must have help."

She tried to shake her head and to explain again about the only thing she wanted; but a terrible paroxysm of coughing seized her. Mr. Maxwell supported her head as well as he could, and Marjorie came in haste with a cup which seemed to contain water. The woman tried to take a swallow, and presently fell back utterly exhausted. Mr. Maxwell tiptoed from the room, motioning Marjorie after him. "She has gone down with incredible rapidity," he said. "It is three weeks since I last saw her. Could you, would it be possible for you to remain here while I go for a doctor and some help? The houses on either side seem to be deserted, and we cannot leave her alone, can we?"

"No," said Marjorie, "we cannot; I will stay, of course." But never in her life had she so shrank from what was a manifest duty. If her mother were only here! He saw the thought in her eyes.

"I will get your mother as soon as I can, Miss

Edmonds, but she is quite a distance from here, remember ; and I think there should be a physician without delay. The woman looks to me as though she were dying.” He was untying and unblanketing his horses while he spoke, and with the last word was off. Marjorie returned to the apparently dying woman. A great terror was upon her heart. What if the poor creature should die while Mr. Maxwell was away ? She could not help feeling that in such a case the woman might as well be utterly alone, for all the help her presence could afford. What did she know about death ? She had never in her life seen any one die. To her childish eyes her father had looked much as usual on that last night when he had kissed her, and smiled on her and held his hand on her head while he prayed for her ; and then she had gone away and slept,—and in the morning her mother had told her gently, very gently, trying to smile through her tears, that the angels had come in the night and carried her father away to his beautiful home. But it was not possible to surround this dying bed with any idea of beauty, or any suggestion of angels. The woman was in mortal suffering ; was in need of help, and she could not help her. The extreme exhaustion which followed the last paroxysm of coughing, did not pass ; Marjorie moistened her lips, bathed her forehead, and fanned her gently ; but the gray pallor which had overspread the woman’s face, deepened, rather than lessened. She looked at Mar-

gorie with great hungry eyes that had a mute appeal in them which was worse than words.

“What is it?” the girl asked, gently, holding herself to outward quiet by a supreme effort. “Is there something I can do for you? Try to bear it for a few minutes; Mr. Maxwell has gone for the doctor, and for my mother; they will be able to do something to help you.” But the hungry look remained in those great sad eyes; the power of speech seemed to have left her. At last, evidently summoning her waning strength for one mighty effort she spoke distinctly one word: “Pray.”

“Oh!” said Marjorie with blanching face, and her voice sounded like a groan, “I *cannot* pray!” she looked like one in mortal terror; she turned and gazed beseechingly toward the door; if Mr. Maxwell would *only come*; if anybody would come who knew how to pray! Could she let this woman die with that one beseeching word on her lips, receiving no response? Yet how was it possible for *her* to pray? To attempt such a thing she felt would be mockery. She knew much, theoretically, of the character of God. She had learned many verses in her childhood; verses which indicated His willingness to hear the feeblest cry. They thronged about her now and pressed her with their questions. Ought she not to try to speak for this departing soul? He would know that her words were sincere, and that she did not know how to pray. Under the spell of those solemn inquiring eyes which seemed to burn into her soul,

she dropped upon her knees, covered her face with her hands and cried out: “O God have mercy on this woman for Christ’s sake, and give her what she needs.” Just that sentence, nothing more. “Pray;” said the voice again, from the bed; and she repeated the same sentence again, and yet again: no others came to her. After a little, she arose, and continued her small ministrations, bathing the temples, moistening the white lips, trying meantime to find the thread of life in the woman’s wrist; for her eyes had closed, and she was lying again as one dead. The sound of bells broke on the intolerable stillness, and in a moment more, Marjorie heard Mr. Maxwell’s step at the door. He came swiftly over to the bedside, and spoke to her in a low tone. “The doctor will be here in a few minutes. I did not wait to get your mother; she is a mile away in the other direction, and I thought perhaps you would prefer to have me wait until the doctor came, before going for her. Has your patient made any sign of life?”

Before Marjorie could reply, the great troubled eyes opened once more, but they seemed not to see, and fixed themselves on vacancy. Her lips moved and formed distinctly that one word again, lower than it was before; just a faint shadow of a word now: “Pray.”

Mr. Maxwell, bending to listen, caught the word and was on his knees in a moment; Marjorie knelt beside him; it was so good to have one who could pray! Then the poor woman’s needs were

presented before the King, in the words of one who had long known how. Earnest, direct, in language simple as a child would use, it seemed to Marjorie that no human speech could be better fitted to her needs. Yet there was a restless movement of the sick woman's hands; presently she turned her eyes and sought Marjorie's face, and said in a solemn whisper: "*You pray.*" Mr. Maxwell looked well-nigh as startled as Marjorie herself had done. He knew that whatever ability this young girl might have to minister to human pain, she had not learned this supreme need of the soul.

"Miss Edmonds," he said, "she is asking you to pray."

"Oh!" said Marjorie again, in bitter anguish, "*I cannot pray!*" Why does she want it when you are here? Kneel down, Mr. Maxwell, and pray again; *do!* she cannot mean me."

It was evident that the woman understood. "*You;*" she said distinctly, with her eyes on Marjorie, "That same prayer." Mr. Maxwell looked bewildered, but Marjorie understood; she must be calling for those very words which had been spoken in her extremity. Could she possibly speak them before this man who knew that she did not pray? Yet what was any man now? In a few minutes the woman would be in the presence of God. Could she let her go with her last cry refused? She must say those words again. In much less time than it has taken to record them,

these thoughts passed through her mind, and once more she was on her knees saying: "O God, have mercy on this woman and give her what she needs, for Christ's sake."

"Amen," said Mr. Maxwell.

"Again;" said the voice of the dying, and again Marjorie's tremulous lips cried the prayer.

"Have mercy for Christ's sake;" it was the voice from the bed which repeated those words slowly, distinctly. Once, twice, three times, pausing many times for breath. The voice grew fainter, ceased. She lay quite still, but her eyes were not closed. They were lifted upward, and on her face there was the semblance of a smile.

CHAPTER XX.

QUESTIONS NEEDING ANSWERS.

“LET us rejoice that we have a God who is always ready to hear;” said Mr. Maxwell as, the solemn silence having continued for some minutes, they arose from their knees.

“This has been a very trying ordeal to you,” he added kindly, “I did not realize that she was so near death, or I would not have left you.”

“Is she *dead*?” asked Marjorie in an awe-stricken voice, her face almost as pale as that of the silent woman on the bed.

“The pulse has stopped: with her last breath she said: ‘For Christ’s sake.’ Let us hope that she is even now in His visible presence. Life here had certainly no joy for her, and but little hope. There is nothing more that we can do, Miss Edmonds, but I think we must remain until the doctor comes. There are no neighbors to whom we can appeal. The doctor must surely come in a few minutes.”

Even while he spoke, there was the merry jingle of bells, coming to a halt before the door. At the same moment the back door opened, and a woman with a shawl over her head, appeared.

“How is she?” she asked, nodding to Marjorie

as she spoke: "I've been gone all day, and I couldn't help kind of worrying about her, she seemed so low and miserable this morning. Oh, mercy! you don't say she is gone? Dear, dear! I was afraid of it! and yet I didn't think it would be so sudden or I would have let the dollar go, poor as I am, and stayed with her; and she has been alone here all day, I suppose? Poor young thing! It seems awful cruel, doesn't it? But there! What else could we do? Poor folks has to work, and I thought I could afford to get some extra bits of comfort for her with this day's work. Oh, no, ma'am, she ain't nothing to me, except that I'm her next-door neighbor, and I've tried to do for her as well as I could. I've looked in every morning before I went away, and every night when I come back; and Saturdays, and odd times I've took hold and helped do up her bit of work. I felt sorry for her on account of her being so young and so sick, and having such a worthless husband. She mourned for him so; that's just what has broke her down. She ain't seen a sight of him now for three or four days; by and by he will come sniveling home and go on at the greatest rate because she is gone; and he did nothing for her while she was here. I ain't no patience with them kind of men. Jack would be a decent enough fellow, too, if he could let the whisky alone. It is that awful whisky that makes such times for poor folks, ma'am; and then to see decent people helping the trade along! that beats me. Well, we'll

do everything we can for her, now she's gone. That's Mr. Maxwell, ain't it? I thought I knew him. He's been awful good to her; been here time and again; brought her oranges, and things; and coal, and once he built up a fire with his own hands; and he's talked and prayed with her, and everything. He's a saint, that man is, if ever there was one. I'm glad he was here to-day. I wonder if he knows anything about Jack? Dr. Potter,"— suddenly turning her attention to the physician to whom a single glance at the bed had revealed the condition of things; he was drawing on his gloves again while he exchanged a few words with Mr. Maxwell. "Dr. Potter, don't you know where we could find Jack Taylor? You know him, don't you? That good-for-nothing fellow who is always drunk nowadays, when he isn't at home sleeping off the effects. He ain't been home for almost a week; that's what has run her down so. But he ought to be looked up now, for decency's sake. If we could get him sober enough for the funeral it seems as if it would kind of comfort her."

The doctor had no information or advice to give, beyond the suggestion that they see some of the distillery men from Snyder's. He had heard that Jack Taylor was hanging around there, trying to get work again though he had been twice discharged.

"They ought to keep him;" said the woman significantly. "He begun this thing out there; was as nice a fellow as ever I see, till he went to work for them; they might finish up their work,

I think. There wouldn't be any need for their business anyhow, if it wasn't for the drunkards, or those who are traveling that road as fast as they can."

Then, while the doctor made haste away, she turned her attention to Mr. Maxwell. That gentleman, however, cut her short in the midst of a sentence and did much of the talking himself. He spoke low, so that Marjorie could not catch a word; save that as he turned away, she heard him say, "I will come to-morrow morning and give you any further help you may need. I think you understand that you are to do whatever is needful?"

"Yes," said the woman, nodding her head; there was an undercurrent of satisfaction in her voice which it was impossible not to note. "I understand, and thank you kindly too; I was troubled to see how we could give her decent burial, and we so poor, all of us, and him so shiftless and worthless. It is very good of you, and we won't forget it. She was too much of a lady to be buried by the town. They was a nice young couple once, Mr. Maxwell. A woman I used to work for used to know her before she was married; she says she come of a good family, and they didn't want her to marry Jack; but she would; and they kind of got out with her; and now they are gone; father and mother, both. But Jack was sober enough when she married him; had been sober for quite a spell; and she thought she could keep him from drinking any more; just as lots of women folks

do. It is queer how one after another, we women make exactly the same blunder, and no one learns from the last one."

"That good woman loves to talk," Mr. Maxwell said with a faint smile, as he helped Marjorie to her seat in the sleigh, "but her heart is in the right place. Silence for a few minutes, then he added with a heavy sigh: "The woman is right, Miss Edmonds; day after day, and year after year, the tragedy goes on, being played before our eyes. Woman after woman, grave after grave; not only women, but little children sacrificed to our Moloch; and the Christian world looks on, and sometimes sighs, and oftener smiles, and lets it go. Sometimes I get so wrought up about this liquor business that it seems to me impossible to live longer in a country which permits it. I wonder that the victims do not lose their reason and rise in protest. A strike of the wives of drunkards, Miss Edmonds, a riot made up of the wives and children and mothers who are victims of the saloon! Can you imagine it?"

The connection might not have been plain to all persons, but despite her effort to put the thought away, there arose before Marjorie just then the image of a bookkeeper in a distillery. What had he to do with Jack Taylor, the drunkard, who had broken his wife's heart? He was merely a bookkeeper; and bookkeeping every one knows is legitimate employment.

New Year's day was over at last, and Marjorie

was in her room alone; free to go over all its varied experiences and let her face flush and pale, and her heart tremble if it would, without fear of being watched and commented upon. Mr. Maxwell had been very thoughtful of her during that homeward drive; shielding her as much as possible even from her mother.

“We struck sorrow in one of its most desolating forms,” he explained, “and your daughter has been tried in strength and nerves.”

Then, after giving her a very brief account of what had taken place, he began to question her in regard to the old lady to whom she had ministered, leaving no room for questions upon her part, concerning the tragedy they two had lived through. When Glyde joined them the way was easier. She was in a high state of excitement and enthusiasm. They had had “wonderful” times, she and the children. It had been so delightful to wash their faces and comb their hair and make changes in their dresses which amazed them. It had been “such fun” to sweep the room, and clear off the shelf, and put everything in order, even to the washing of the few poor dishes; and they had set the table with dainty things which the baskets furnished, and gotten everything ready for the mother’s home-coming. Then, to see that mother’s face when she finally came! That was beyond even Glyde’s descriptive powers. She had never had such an experience in her life before. She knew now just what she would like to do in

the world. Didn't they have city missionaries, or town missionaries in some places, whose duty it was to go around among the people and do just such things? She had read of them, she thought. Wouldn't it be possible for her to get some such work to do? Didn't they pay salaries for such work? She wouldn't want any pay now, of course, but if she should take it up for a life-work. One wouldn't want much, just enough to buy very plain clothes, and a little food every day. How perfectly delightful it would be to give one's whole time to work like that!

Mr. Maxwell entered heartily into her enthusiasm; helped her plans along by suggesting ways out of difficulties which presented themselves to her mind, and evolved new plans by his very questions. It is true he thought that it would be necessary for her to wait until she was a little older, but he assured her soothingly that time was a very fast traveler, and that some morning before she knew it, she would awaken old enough to take such work upon her shoulders. She argued that point with him a little.

Why did everybody persist in thinking her so young? She was nineteen, nearly as old as Marjorie, who, everybody knew, was a young lady, while they spoke of her as a little girl. That was simply because she had two older sisters who themselves considered her a child. But why should she wait to be old? Children would like her better as she was, and it was the children she

wanted to reach. She wanted to tell them stories, such stories as would help them. Why, they were startlingly ignorant! those children with whom she had been visiting. They knew almost nothing of the Bible, and their ideas of God were really shocking!

It was true, Mr. Maxwell said gravely, home missionaries were needed in just that line, and in the very town in which she lived; perhaps she could do something in a small way even while she was so young, but there were difficulties to be considered. In many families where the children were in sore need, it would not be safe for a young lady to visit. For instance, he would hardly have left her where he did, had he not been quite sure that the husband and father who lived just next door was not at home and would not be during the day. Sometimes it was very unsafe for a stranger, and a lady to be in the neighborhood when he was at home.

“The trouble is, Miss Douglass,” he said gravely, “that rum makes husbands, and fathers, and neighbors, into wild animals sometimes. It is that element in some form or other which renders it unsafe for young ladies to do a great many things which they might otherwise do. It is, however, only too true that if it were not for rum, a great deal of the work would not need to be done; so the problem is complicated.”

Throughout these conversations, Mr. Maxwell almost pointedly left Marjorie outside; even

answering for her once or twice when Glyde appealed to her. It was done in such a manner that she could not but understand him as planning rest for her overstrained nerves. He by no means forgot her; the slightest disarrangement of the robes which were carefully tucked about her, was noticed and remedied on the instant, and in a dozen little unobtrusive ways did he let her know that his thought was for her. Once he gave her the reins for a moment, and bending forward, rearranged the wrappings about her feet. While he did so, Ralph Bramlett's sleigh passed them, and that young man glowered at him in a way that he would not have understood had he noticed it. As for Marjorie, she missed the look; Mr. Maxwell was leaning forward in such a manner that she could not see who passed them. Alone in her room that evening, she thought of those quiet attentions and was grateful. She saw in them only added marks of his thoughtfulness for womanhood. How gracious, and courteous, and kind he was, always! Truly kind and truly good; she realized it that evening as she had not before. She told herself that it was pleasant to have such a man for a friend, and that she should never forget all the kindnesses he had shown to her mother and herself.

Then she turned her thoughts from him and allowed herself to gaze steadily at Ralph Bramlett for a few minutes; realizing in the depths of her heart that it was a sort of farewell gaze. It had

now become very plain to her that he had settled his future; when next she met Estelle Douglass she felt certain that she would have a story to tell which would prove the truth of this. Such being the case, it should have something to do with those letters and gifts which she had decided long ago not to return. That decision had not been reversed, but she must keep them no longer.

Since Ralph Bramlett belonged to another, she had no right to treasure the tokens of his long friendship for her. There was a cheery fire burning in her grate, more for pleasure than necessity, as the house was heated by furnace, but it would serve her purpose well to-night. She brought out the locked box and untied package after package to assure herself that nothing besides Ralph's notes had by accident been included with them, then, not allowing herself to read so much as a page, she consigned them one by one to the flames.

It was a slow grave piece of work; as one might steadily and knowingly put away what had been part of one's very self. Not only letters, but valentines; pretty boyish ones, which had come to her in the days when both were children, and had spent hours in studying what selections to make for each other. Then there were dainty booklets, ribbon-tied, two or three of them heart-shaped; and there were cards with very special verses underscored; some, with verses written on the reverse side in Ralph's own fine style. He

was a good penman, and had always enjoyed doing especially fine work for Marjorie's eyes. These cards, pretty as they were, must be sacrificed to the flames; even the underscored sentences were such as it would not do to have on exhibition now. There were dried flowers, half blown rosebuds withered before their time, and pressed violets by the handful; the flames leaped up about them eagerly, seeming to rejoice in this wholesale holocaust. Marjorie lingered over a photograph of Ralph, taken when he was just nineteen. It was a boyish, handsome face; surely she might keep that. People had photographs of their friends. She held it long, clasped in both hands, and considered; the conclusion was that she leaned forward solemnly and laid it on the coals. She would be *true* not only to herself but to that other woman who had a right to claim Ralph now. This could not be like other photographs, standing about on easels, on library tables, or family room mantels, to be handled and chatted over by friends; this had memories and associations which could never be separated from it. She did not want to keep it. It was not hers any longer. She did not hurry through any part of this work, she was slow and grave; more like a middled-aged woman who was taking a retrospective view of her long ago past, rather than a girl who was putting away what was so recent and vivid. In truth, Ralph's management of this entire affair had removed him so far away from her and made the time seem so

long, that sometimes she almost thought it must be years since she had met him familiarly.

All the while she was at work, there was in her mind a solemn undertone of feeling that there was something else, something of infinitely more importance, which must be considered. She was not one who could get soon, or lightly, away from the experiences of that afternoon. Death in one of its most solemn forms had confronted her; she had almost been alone with it; she had realized its certainty as never before. The thought had forced itself upon her heart that here was one who would be faithful. No matter how long he delayed, he was absolutely certain to come at last; and he might appear at any moment. How suddenly he had come to the woman whom she had watched die! taking the miserable husband so utterly unawares that perhaps he did not even yet know that his wife had escaped from him forever. For such an absolute certainty as this, the merest common sense would suggest that one ought to be ready. But there was more than this thought pressing upon her heart; she felt alone, dreary, desolate, in need of a friend; such a friend as Jesus Christ seemed to be, not only to Mr. Maxwell but to Glyde Douglass, the young girl who was maturing so rapidly and so sweetly under His guidance. What must it be to have an ever-present Friend to speak to as Mr. Maxwell had spoken to the Lord Jesus that afternoon? What must it be to be able to realize His help in trouble? In "little troubles," as Glyde had said, as well

as in the heavier ones which were weighing down her soul. She believed in Christianity; she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour; she knew there were people who had so accepted him, and who lived in daily realization of His presence. Suppose that the great mass of those who professed this *were* merely church members, as she had hinted to Glyde the other day, what had that to do with her? Since there were some genuine Christians must she needs be a hypocrite or a worldling, or a self-deceived professor? In the depths of her heart she knew that from her childhood there had been an intention to sometime give her mind to this subject, and settle it for herself. For the first time in her life this intention presented itself before her as something not much better than an insult, so long as it was delayed. Was it possible that she could be the sort of person who would be willing to dally with such offers of love and help and care as this! Besides, what utter folly it was! Could a reasonable being find one excuse for it? That hour of death about which she had thought, why not get ready for it? That poor woman struggling for breath, gasping out her wants in language almost unintelligible, ought to have had no such serious business to attend to at that hour, ought to have been ready. Moreover, she might not have had even those few last moments in which to try to repair her lifetime of neglect. The moment Marjorie thought this, that other thought about the insult of it all, presented

itself to her in a new form. Could anything be meaner than for a girl like herself, for instance, young and strong, with much opportunity for work before her perhaps, to deliberately put away the claims of this One who asked for allegiance *now*? Put them away until some hour when she should feel herself in sore need and then cry to Him to give her what she had refused at His hands through the years?

Imagine an earthly friend so treated!

Marjorie's heart was very sore just then over earthly friendships. She knew just how silence and coldness and indifference could sting. Was it a possible thing that Jesus Christ wanted her? Claimed her love, would give her love in return, and she had been treating His call,—not with scorn, but with what was in some respects worse, utter indifference! How could she expect Him to tarry much longer waiting for her? Why should she wait? Didn't she need Him? oh, didn't she *need* Him now! Could she do it? Could she be the sort of Christian that she should? She had been held back she knew, for years, by the feeling that there were too many Christians now of a certain kind, and that she would only be another of the same sort. But since there were experiences which seemed to change one's very nature, could not she have such a change as this? How did people get it?

CHAPTER XXI.

“GIVE ME WHAT I NEED.”

THEORETICALLY Marjorie Edmonds knew a great deal about conversion ; yet when it came to the practical, she realized that her knowledge was very unsatisfactory. The words “repentance” and “regeneration” had been as familiar, all through her childhood, almost as her own name. The catechism of her mother’s church was A B C to her so far as mere words were concerned ; but she had not understood their meaning any better than Ralph Bramlett had the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” was one of the familiar verses which floated through her mind. What did it mean ? She had believed on Him all her life ; she knew that He was a reality and a Saviour ; but she knew also that she was not saved. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” was another verse which came and stood before her. That indeed she had not done ; she had put His claim deliberately from her too many times not to be sure of it. But how did one seek ? And how long a process was it ? It ought not to be very long, she reflected, because there was that faithful

messenger who might come. What was there to assure her that he might not call for her that very night, even while she slept. People did die so. She had heard of more than one instance, and that recently, of sudden death. No, she was not frightened; she was not in any sense of the word a coward. She did not suppose it very probable that she should be called to die before morning; she was simply like a person of common sense, she told herself, looking at the possibilities.

Besides, she did not want to wait for long processes; she wanted to settle it now. "O Marjorie, won't you think about what I asked you?" Glyde had murmured, as she clasped her hand for good-bye that afternoon. There had been no opportunity for further words, but Marjorie had understood; Glyde had not known what she had been through, nor how certainly she would have to think about these things this evening. But surely they required more than thinking about; she felt very far away indeed from Christ; felt as though some tremendous change ought to be wrought within her before she would dare intrude upon Him. Yct this was not in accordance with her theoretic teaching. It must be, however, something like what people meant when they talked about conversion. But how did they get it? She looked for her Bible with a vague feeling that it ought to be able to point the way. She knew no better where to read, than Ralph Bramlett had done; but she had no idea of starting with the first chapter

of Genesis. She had not yet learned how to find Christ in the Old Testament, and it was Christ she wanted. She opened it at random and read: "Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. Jesus said unto him, Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole; and immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way." The story, though perfectly familiar to her, sounded new; for some reason it touched the fountain of tears, and they began to gather for the first time in many days. How short it was, that prayer! shorter even than the one she had offered for the dying woman. And how instantaneous and complete was the answer? "Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way." Was she ready to follow him? Certainly she would be, she thought, if she only knew what following meant, in her case. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," this verse her eye rested on as she turned the leaves. Was she ready to deny herself? But deny herself of what? "The cross"—yes she had a cross and it was heavy, but the Lord Jesus Christ had nothing to do with it, so she thought; it was altogether a human cross and she was bearing it alone. If there were another, to bear for Him, she would be almost glad of it; but she did not know how to find it. If He were here so that she might speak to Him as the blind man did; if He were out on the street,

she would go this minute in the night and the darkness and hurry until she caught up with Him. Then what would she say? “Lord that I might receive my sight?” Yes, that would do; it was what she wanted; such mental sight as would enable her to understand His ways in which she wanted to walk. Would He say to her, “Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole?” Perhaps faith was what she needed. Yet she believed in Christ? Still, she owned to herself that she did not believe, could not *make* herself believe that He really and truly cared for her as an individual; that He would pay any attention to what she said. Why should He? There was nothing in her to win His love, nothing about her that He could enjoy. It was inconceivable that He would be willing to hold intimate companionship with her day by day. Yet, if He should, it would make all her life different. “It is that which I need,” she said aloud, and sorrowfully, “I need to be entirely different, to be made over. But after all, that is pure selfishness; I do not suppose He answers selfish prayers. I suppose I want Him because I am so utterly tired of myself. Oh, I don’t know *what* I want, nor how to do any of it.”

The words of prayer which she had repeated so often that afternoon, recurred again to her; if that was prayer, it might answer for her as well as for the dying woman. “God have mercy on me,” she might say, “and give me what I need.” She sat and stared at the dying fire, and the ashes of the

treasures which she had committed to it, for several minutes longer, then rising slowly, knelt before her chair, and laying her head wearily on its cushions repeated the words of which she had been thinking: "O God, have mercy on me, and give me what I need for Christ's sake." He who knows the uttermost need of the human heart, could tell better what that prayer meant, than she could herself. Long she knelt, using no other words, not repeating those again, not praying, consciously, simply waiting. She was not even thinking; there seemed to have come a lull in her thoughts. Presently there came to her the memory of a little old book hidden behind finer ones on the library shelves. Its title was: "How I Found the Way."

It was an old-fashioned book and its language was quaint and queer; at least, it had struck them so; she and Ralph had laughed together over some of its phrases; but the title was suggestive. Perhaps it could point the way for which she was seeking. She wished she had the book; there had come to her an overpowering desire to have this matter settled. She felt almost afraid of putting it from her again; something—she was almost tempted to think that it was some One—was saying to her soul: "Now is the time." Why should she not go downstairs and get that old book? The door was closed between her mother's room and hers, as it often was during these days; her mother must be sleeping; she could go so quietly as not to disturb her. Besides it could

not be late ; she had come early to her room. If her mother should hear her, it would be a commonplace-enough explanation that she was in search of a book. Not giving herself time for further thought, she softly unlocked the door and slipped down the heavily carpeted stairs, match in hand ; she meant not to light the gas until she reached the back parlor. But the back parlor was lighted, and standing before the bookcase, open book in hand, was Mr. Maxwell. He turned as the door swung open and spoke at once.

"Miss Edmonds, I hope I have not frightened you? Your mother gave me permission to mouse among these old books of hers. I am in search of a quotation, of whose authorship I am not certain. Miss Edmonds, I hope you are not ill? Can I serve you in any way?" For he could not but note her extreme pallor, and in her eyes was a new look, of whose meaning he could not be sure. He came towards her as he spoke, and instinctively placed a chair for her ; she did not look able to stand.

"I came for a book," said Marjorie, taking a sudden resolution, "but perhaps you will do better than a book. There is something that I want to know."

"If I can help you in any way, be sure I shall be only too glad to do so." He spoke with exceeding gravity ; something in her tone and manner indicated that what she wanted to know was to be met with utmost seriousness. She

dropped into the chair he had drawn toward her, and sat for some seconds looking straight before her into the fire which still smouldered in the grate, saying nothing.

“Mr. Maxwell,” she began at last, “that woman whom we saw die this afternoon,—she was not ready to die, was she?”

“No,” said Mr. Maxwell. “She was not ready to live; therefore, of course, not ready to die. The claims of the Lord Jesus Christ had been pressed upon her many times, and she had put them aside for what seemed to her more important matters. Yet, Miss Edmonds, we have so wonderful and so merciful a Saviour, that I can but hope and believe that He had pity for her ignorance, and sympathy for her sorrows, and heard that eleventh-hour cry of hers, and took her to Himself. I am sorry that one so young and so unused to trouble as you are, should have been suddenly thrust into the midst of such a scene. I know that it cannot but have made a deep impression; but I hope you will not let it wear upon your nerves.”

“It isn’t that,—” she said quickly. “I am not nervous; at least I have never supposed that I was; I don’t think it is because I am nervous that I have come to the conclusion which I have tonight; perhaps it is simply common-sense. Mr. Maxwell, I want to know Jesus Christ; to have a personal acquaintance with Him, such as Glyde Douglass speaks of. I want Him for a friend, a Burden-bearer.” Her voice trembled a little as

she spoke those last words, but she hurried on, apparently in fear that she might be interrupted. “I suppose I want what people mean when they talk about conversion; but I do not know how to get it. I have been reared in a Christian home, by a Christian mother, who tried to make the way plain. The terms which people use in speaking about these matters have been familiar to me since childhood, but some way they seem to be all *words*; they do not convey any meaning to me. The Bible says: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ Now I have always believed on Him; there is in my mind no shadow of doubt as to His existence, and His power, and His love,—for that matter; but I am not saved, and am conscious that I am not. What is there for me to do?”

“Are you sure that you believe on Him? If you do, will you not follow His directions?”

“That is precisely what I want to do; I am telling you that I do not know how. The very first step to take is unknown to me.”

“Give yourself to Him, Miss Edmonds.”

She turned quickly and looked at him out of earnest, troubled eyes.

“Mr. Maxwell, how can I do it? I do not understand. He is not here, not in visible presence, how is it possible for me to give—*anything* to Him? That is figurative language, of course; but it does not express anything to me; what does it mean?”

“Miss Edmonds, will you give that handkerchief which lies in your lap, to me?”

She glanced down at the square of linen, then back to his face with a most surprised look; after a moment's hesitation she said, “Yes, of course; but I do not get your meaning.”

She picked it up, however, and reached it forth to him. He took it with utmost gravity. “Thank you,” he said, then he wheeled a chair near her and sat down.

“Miss Edmonds,” he said, “in passing this handkerchief over to me, were you not conscious of a distinct act of your will? You could, of course, have denied my request; could have said distinctly, ‘No, I will not give it to you;’ or, saying nothing, could still have denied me. Instead, you consciously, deliberately, passed it from your possession into mine. Now, what I want to convey by that illustration, is the thought that there must be a conscious effort of the human will, in this transaction between the Lord Jesus Christ and yourself. He asks for *yourself*; your power, your strength, your love, your allegiance,—in short all that is comprised in that term ‘yourself.’ Now, you can refuse Him; you have the power. You can do so deliberately, with a heart-determination, or you can do it by putting aside His claim, treating it with indifference, allowing yourself to forget all about it. Or you can consciously and deliberately declare to Him that you now, from this time, give yourself into His keeping,

to be directed, guided, managed. It is as deliberate an act of the will as it was to pass over your handkerchief to me. Do you get my thought?”

“In part,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation, “but not entirely, after all. To give one’s self, means to give one’s affections; and I cannot make myself love *any one*, can I?”

“No, *you* cannot; but the Lord Jesus Christ can; that is His part; your part is the surrender. It is not a matter of feeling, but of decision. You might have disliked to give me this handkerchief; you might not have had the least desire to do it; yet you might have obliged your will to perform the act. The mistake which we make, in dealing with religious questions, is to suppose that the matter turns of necessity on a question of feeling; I admit that there is likely to be more or less feeling at such a time, but not that it is to be taken into special consideration. If there is an honest deliberate intention to give one’s powers to the Lord Jesus Christ, to be known henceforth as His servant, to wear his colors, as it were, to walk day by day in the paths which He directs, to do, as fast as we understand it, his pleasure, we may safely leave our feelings to take care of themselves. He, on His part, is pledged to take away the heart which does not feel for Him, and give, in its stead, a heart of flesh. The divine part of this matter, the regeneration, is something which we do not understand; it is something which the Lord does for us in His infinite love and infinite power; but

our part is very plain ; we are not to *make* ourselves love Him, we are not to wait until we do love Him ; it is part of His infinite condescension that we are permitted even to say to Him, that we are not conscious of any love for Him in our strange hard hearts, but that we have resolved to serve Him. And He will hear us and accept us, and ratify the covenant. The marriage relation, which is so often used as an illustration of this matter, is not complete in all its parts ; illustrations rarely are. In every true marriage, the heart has passed over into another's keeping before the vows are taken, but in this marriage between the Lord Jesus Christ and the soul, He accepts the vows, even though we are not conscious that love goes with them ; because He can control the human heart when the will is given into His keeping ; and He knows that the love will follow. Am I making my meaning plain ?”

“ Yes,” she said, “ I think so. It is something of that kind which has troubled me. I did not feel sure that I loved—*any one*. I don't think I *feel* with my heart at all ; it is just my judgment.”

“ Is your judgment willing to make the decision, and leave the feelings to Him ?” There was not an immediate reply to this question, and after waiting a moment Mr. Maxwell continued : “ It was once my privilege to work in a series of meetings with an old and eminently successful minister of Christ, and I remember, and have occasion to do

so with deep gratitude, the form of covenant which he used. It ran in this wise: ‘I do now upon my knees in Thy presence give myself to Thee; I do this honestly, intelligently, deliberately for time and for eternity.’ Are you ready to make such a surrender of self as that?”

Marjorie had removed her eyes from the smouldering fire and was looking down; she was still silent for several moments, then she raised her eyes to his face and spoke slowly.

“I believe I am, Mr. Maxwell, if I understand myself; I think I am in dead earnest. I have thought about this matter before, of course, but never as I have to-night. I may say that I had reached the decision before I came downstairs; I came in search of a book which I thought might show me the way to do it. But I think I understand you perhaps better than I should have understood the book; still, I am not satisfied; I feel mean! It seems to me that I am taking all, and giving nothing. There is nothing in me for Christ to love; I do not know how it is possible for Him to love me; I am selfish, and hard, and utterly hateful; yet I cannot help wanting His love and care.” The tears started as she spoke, and dropped slowly down on the hand with which she suddenly covered her eyes.

“Yes, I know; that is what we bring to Him. Utterly unworthy of His love; selfish, we seem to ourselves in our very longing for it; unable, it seems to us to do a thing for Him in return,—yet

He waits for just such gifts as these; pledges eternal love and care, and begs us to accept the gift. May I kneel with you now, Miss Edmonds, and will you give yourself to Him, while He waits?"

Her answer was to rise and drop on her knees. A moment's solemn stillness, then her voice, clear and steady, repeated as nearly as she could remember them the words which Mr. Maxwell had given her. Especially were the tones distinct and slow when she repeated that word "deliberately," and those other words, "for time and for eternity."

"Amen," said Mr. Maxwell, then he followed with a few earnest words of prayer, commending this new-comer to the special and tender care of the covenant-keeping Lord. She remembered long afterward how earnestly he asked that her heart might be so filled to overflowing with the love of Christ as to make all other loves seem unnecessary. As they arose, he held out his hand to her with a grave smile.

"It is needless to try to tell you how much I thank you," he said, "for letting me be a witness to this compact. I feel that it means solemn business, not only for eternity, but for time; and there is a sense in which that is more important to us now, than eternity. It is our opportunity for service. I am sure there has been a worker received into the army to-night. God bless you and grant you the joy of harvest. I have no fears whatever in regard to that matter of feeling; I

hope you will not allow the enemy of souls to torment you concerning it.

"You will love the Lord Jesus Christ with a supreme and all-controlling love, as soon as you come to know Him better. A woman like you, who admires what is beautiful, and good, and pure, cannot help loving Him. It is only because your interests have been absorbed elsewhere that you have not settled with Him long before."

He walked with her to the door and held it open for her to pass. It was at that moment that the sound of the door-bell pealed through the quiet house.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EVENING OF DECISIONS.

MARJORIE started nervously. "It seems late for the bell to ring," she said, "how late is it?"

"The clock struck eleven not long ago." As Mr. Maxwell spoke, he drew a match from his pocket and lighted the hall gas. Then he stepped forward to the door, Marjorie waiting under the gaslight to learn what could be wanted.

She remembered for a long time, just what a strange sensation it gave her when the locked and bolted door was finally unfastened and thrown open, revealing Ralph Bramlett! He uttered a single exclamation, which might have expressed only surprise; she could not afterwards recall what it was. As for her, her surprise was so great that she stood quite still and waited. But his errand was prosaic enough. He had reached home a short time before, to find his mother quite ill; and needing a woman's care; and his sister was out of town. Could Mrs. Edmonds give him the address of Nurse Crawford, who used to be in their family, and of whom they had lost sight? His mother thought that Mrs. Edmonds would know just where to find her.

“Yes,” said Marjorie, coming out of her bewilderment, and speaking quickly, “mamma will know about her; she was here only a few days ago. I will ask mamma.” And she sped up the stairs.

“Come in,” said Mr. Maxwell hospitably. “Will you have a seat while you wait? Mrs. Edmonds has retired, I believe; there may be a few minutes’ delay. I hope your mother is not seriously ill?” But he need not have tried to be sociable; the young man was in no mood for sociability.

His attempt at reply was hardly civil, and Mr. Maxwell, feeling that words from him were evidently not wanted, stood silently by until Marjorie was seen coming downstairs; then he went back to the library, closing the door after him. He need not have done so. Ralph Bramlett had no civil words even for Marjorie, just then. In her heart was a kind, grave sympathy for him; it seemed as though he must have heard it in her voice. “Mamma says that Nurse Crawford is at the corner of Bond and Adams streets; that boarding-house, you know. She is not engaged anywhere and will be sure to go with you. Oh, Ralph, I hope your mother is not very ill! Mamma wants to know if she can be of any assistance? She would be glad to come at once, if she may. Mr. Maxwell will take her over there, I am sure.”

“No,” said Ralph, sharply, “she will not be wanted. Mother is not alarmingly ill; she simply

needs care. I am sorry to have had to trouble you. I did not think of anybody else who would be likely to know about Nurse Crawford." Then he had turned and left her standing in the doorway. When he reached the first corner, he looked back and Marjorie had disappeared; Mr. Maxwell stood in the doorway alone. He muttered something again, not complimentary to that gentleman, and dashed around the corner at full speed. Marjorie went slowly back upstairs, Mr. Maxwell having assured her that he would make all fastenings secure.

For a few weeks past she had occasionally occupied herself with surmisings as to when they would meet face to face, she and Ralph, and be compelled to speak to each other. Of course the time would come; they could not go on in this way through the years, nor through the winter. Even in church they might meet occasionally, though the Bramlett pew was on the other side of the church from them, and for weeks they had successfully avoided each other; for that matter, Ralph had not been very regular in his attendance at church. But of course there must come a change. How would it come? How would he treat her? Did he mean not to know her any more? In that note he had called her "Miss Edmonds." Must she say "Mr. Bramlett?" Could she train her lips to form those words? She had called him so in jest, sometimes, when they were young together,—how long ago it seemed!

She had tried various titles, to see which would sound the best. "Dr. Bramlett," "Judge Bramlett," and the like; always returning to that word "Judge," and assuring him that that was the one which fitted his name and face. She thought she might in time learn to call him that; it did not sound so utterly strange as "Mr. Bramlett." Now they had met once more; but what a strange meeting! "Oh, Ralph!" she had said, without thinking, under the fear that his mother was seriously ill; but he had repulsed her. He would not have even her sympathy. He had called her nothing, but had rushed away as rapidly as he could, seeming to be almost angry with her. It was very strange; she had now no feeling of anger in her heart toward him. She could almost have said to him: "Oh, Ralph, don't treat me so! Let us be friends; if you cannot care for me any more, never mind; if you like Estelle instead of me, why, you cannot help that. I forgive you, but let us be friends." No, she would not have said those words, of course, because he might have misunderstood them; but she could feel them.

Mrs. Edmonds's door opened as her daughter came up the stairs; she was hastily dressing.

"What does he say, Marjorie? Does he want me to come?"

"No, mamma, he said there was no need. He does not think his mother is seriously ill; but she needs care, and Hannah is away. He went at once for Nurse Crawford; she is at home, I saw

her to-night as we passed, so it will be all right. What a pity it is that I disturbed you! if I had only thought a moment, I might have told him where to find Nurse Crawford without coming to you."

"Daughter, I do not understand. Did you answer the bell? and have you been up all this time? How came you to go down, dear, alone? I do not like to have you answering bells at this time of night."

"I did not, mother. Mr. Maxwell was in the back-parlor, studying those old books, and he went to the door. I was downstairs, too, so I saw Ralph as soon as the door was opened."

Was that sufficient explanation? Her mother regarded her curiously, somewhat anxiously. Were there always to be secrets between her daughter and herself? The communicating door was still closed. She had noticed it with a sigh, when she dropped asleep, after waiting long, it seemed to her. The anxious look in her eyes went to Marjorie's heart; she wanted to be very tender of her mother.

"It is not late, Motherie," she said, using the pet name which the mother had not heard for several weeks. "It could not have been much after ten when I went downstairs. I was in search of an old book of ours, hoping that it would give me some help in a line where I greatly needed it; but I found Mr. Maxwell among the books, and he gave me just the help I was searching for,

Motherie, I wanted to know how to give myself away forever into the keeping of Jesus Christ; and he told me how. That will make you glad, will it not?"

Will Marjorie ever have sweeter kisses than those with which her mother covered cheeks and lips? Will her head be ever drawn to a tenderer human resting-place than the mother's breast afforded? "Glad?" Mrs. Edmonds, quiet, reserved woman that she was, could have shouted for joy! She knew it meant so much; this surrender of her daughter's. By nature timid and shrinking, she had, by turns, admired, and stood appalled, before the indomitable energy and persistence of her child, and wondered whereunto such power would lead her. But now that she had accepted a Leader, the mother could feel how surely she would follow Him, and of what value her strength of will would be in His service.

Then at last, Marjorie turned the key in her own door, and was alone once more on this eventful night. She went and stood before her dressing-bureau, and looked at herself deliberately in the mirror. Had any outward change taken place in her appearance? Of course there had not, and she smiled at her childishness, but a strange restfulness had certainly come into her heart. She felt as though her feet rested at last on firm ground; she realized that a matter of infinite importance had been settled since she last stood there. Whatever came to her in the near or distant future, nothing

could unsettle the security of her present foothold. Life had taken on a new and solemn meaning; it was serious business, it was true, to live, but it was also dignified business, worthy of an immortal soul's best efforts. Hitherto she had played at life; now she would begin to live in earnest.

It was not until the gas had been turned out for the night, and the communicating door had been set wide open, and Marjorie's head was resting on her pillow, that she remembered that her handkerchief was still in Mr. Maxwell's possession.

* * * * *

It would perhaps be hard to imagine a greater contrast than Ralph Bramlett's New Year's evening presented to this one of Marjorie's. It will be remembered that he was a man of moods, and the great barometer in the office where he toiled, could not have indicated changes of temperature more rapidly than his mental moods changed front. Very recently he had determined within himself that it was high time to end this farce. He had punished Marjorie, and for that matter himself too, quite enough. Probably the reason why she did not write to him, as he had fully expected her to do, was because her immaculate mother did not approve of it. He would call upon her, formally enough, as he might on any passing acquaintance, but her way of receiving the call should guide him as to his next step. In his secret heart he believed that there would be no difficulty about that next step. There were moments when he felt quite

certain that Marjorie's reception of his advances would be all that he could desire. Then he heard that the Edmonds's home would depart from its time-honored custom and not open its doors to New Year's callers. For a few, minutes he was annoyed; in the next few he had decided that this was so much in his favor. He was not supposed to know that the house was not open as usual; he would ring their bell, and if the little maid, who was in the habit of serving them on special days, responded, he would tell her that he was too old a friend to stand on ceremony and bid her take his card to Miss Marjorie. This, he told himself, would be a stroke of genius; if Marjorie once got his card in her possession, he felt sure of the rest, and they would not be annoyed by callers. If Mrs. Edmonds should answer the bell herself, he would be as dignified as she could possibly be, but he would inform her that he wished to see Miss Marjorie on important business. "She will hardly deny me the house!" he said, waxing indignant over her possible coldness. It will have to be admitted, in passing, that he also prepared for another possibility by muttering to himself that if that puppy of a Maxwell came to the door he would kick him down the steps!

To one of Ralph Bramlett's temperament, having carried out his intentions mentally to such perfection, even having arranged a programme of the conversation, according to his favorite method, imagine what it was to have his plans completely over-

turned by seeing Marjorie drive gayly by, not only seated beside Mr. Maxwell, but actually driving his handsome horses for him. It was characteristic of the type of young men to which he belonged that he took jealous thought, even then, to the fact that the horses were finer than any which he had to drive. After that, imagine the torture which he must have endured for the next hour, in listening to Estelle Douglass's eager information; having first committed himself before her in a way which he could not but feel would make his future with Marjorie more difficult still. Having returned Estelle to her place in the McAllister parlors, this much-abused man gave himself up to gloom for the next few hours; evolving only this, out of the chaos of his thoughts, that he would find out if possible just how far Marjorie's intimacy with her mother's lodger had progressed. The person who could tell him a great deal, he was convinced, was Estelle Douglass. With this thought in view he called upon her as early in the evening as he could hope to find her at home, and very soon began what he thought was a skillful method of questioning, to secure all the information which she possessed. Unfortunately for his peace of mind, Estelle believed that she possessed a great deal. Glyde's innocent remarks concerning Mr. Maxwell's reading aloud in the Edmonds's parlor, her accounts of their plans for New Year's day, and above all, the eager story which she had to tell that evening, had furnished her far-seeing sister

with much material. In truth, her translation of certain remarks of Marjorie's and of Mr. Maxwell's, would not have been recognized by themselves. Not that Estelle meant to falsify, or had an idea that she was really doing so; she possessed a vivid imagination, and wanted to believe in the theory which she built up out of her meager facts. She was successful to the degree that she convinced Ralph Bramlett that Marjorie had been, what he chose to call "playing a part" with him. He jumped immediately to the wildest conclusions; made himself believe that even at the time she had written that last note to him, she was receiving Mr. Maxwell's special attentions. Nay, it was entirely possible that there had been an understanding between them on that very night in which she had walked away from the Schuyler farm in a supposed burst of indignation. Was it probable that she would have started off on a seven-miles walk at that time of night, if she had not been reasonably sure of being met and taken care of? It astonished and disgusted him that he had not thought of this before. It was all very plain now, he told himself; from first to last he had been made a fool of! Marjorie had pretended to be devoted to him at the very time when she was using him as a foil, the better to show off her perfections to Mr. Maxwell.

How he could have concocted such an absurd theory as that out of any material with which he had to build, cannot be explained by any laws based upon

reason and common sense; it must simply be remembered that he was a man of extremes; that he paid, when he was in a certain humor, the least possible attention to the dictates of common sense, and that the whim of the passing moment governed him to an alarming degree. Left to himself, he might have concluded by the next day that he had been unnecessarily hasty, and that Marjorie had been simply treating Mr. Maxwell as he had Estelle Douglass, entertaining herself during the period of coldness between them. In the course of the next thirty-six hours he would almost certainly have gotten back to his complacent frame of mind, and been ready to plan again for that interrupted call. But he was not left to himself. Estelle took care to plan that she should not be interrupted by other callers, and as her sister Fannie was not at home, she and Ralph had the evening together.

“So you think they are really engaged?” he tried to ask the question carelessly, interrupting some remark of hers, to do it.

“Why I think they must be, of course. How else is such exceeding familiarity to be accounted for? To judge from Glyde’s reports, they have gotten so far that they put all ceremony aside and treat each other like people who have had an understanding for ever so long. That isn’t like Marjorie, you know, unless there is an engagement. I always thought her a very reticent person. Oh, I wouldn’t have had such an idea, if you had not told me this afternoon that there was nothing

whatever between you and her, and had never been, save a boy-and-girl friendship. I confess that I have not understood it, and that I have been distressed both for Marjorie, and for you. But the moment you told me that, and I realized that you and she had simply been like brother and sister all these years, it threw a new light upon everything. I hope it will be all right with Marjorie ; he seems very much of a stranger ; they really do not know anything about him, of course, except what he says of himself. But he is wealthy I have heard, and Marjorie likes money ; at least, she likes the luxuries which money will produce ; and she is fond of position, too. He is an author, you know ; and a college professor besides ; one who has been given a year's vacation to enable him to complete the preparation of some stupid book ;—text-book, I think. It must be a dreadful bore to have to do, all the time, with such an extremely literary man ; but I presume that is what fascinated Marjorie at first. She is a little bit inclined to be aristocratic in her tastes ; I have always known that. Mrs. Edmonds is not wealthy, it is true, but she belongs to a very old family ; and Marjorie was always disposed, I think, to look down a little on people who had to earn their living in ways which did not happen to suit her taste."

Ralph was turning over piles of music, while Estelle was saying this, supposed to be hunting for a song which she had asked him to sing with her. He bent lower over the music-rack in the

hope that she might not see the dark flush which overspread his face at these words. He felt that he understood her only too well. What could she mean but that Marjorie had looked down upon him because he was earning his living as a book-keeper, instead of being a law-student, as he knew she had wished him to be? Well, let her go! After all these years of intimacy with him, if she had been fascinated by a stranger because he could write books, and had a title or two after his name, she was not worthy of an honest man's love. He would have nothing more to do with her.

He found the music, at last, and they sang the song; Estelle remarking cheerfully at its close: "Our voices sound well together, I think. What a pity we haven't an audience! Suppose we were to go around giving parlor concerts? We might make a good deal of money. We would look very well together, too; we are of about the right size. We could take Glyde along to play the accompaniments. Wouldn't that be an original way to raise funds?"

She laughed gayly as she spoke, and was talking the merest nonsense, of course. But Ralph replied gravely, "We would look reasonably well together, perhaps, under any circumstances. I do not know but you and I are fairly well suited to each other. How would it do to enter into partnership on other lines than concert-giving?"

He spoke under impulse, of course. When did this young man speak in any other way? He

hardly realized the import of what he was saying. The strongest feeling of which he was conscious at the moment was a desire to show Marjorie Edmonds in some way that he was by no means broken-hearted over her, nor did he lack for intimate companionship because she had played him false. He was, possibly, unprepared for the deep womanly flush on Estelle's face, and the light in her eyes. He was certainly unprepared for the warmth of her reply. He went home very early, that evening, much earlier than Estelle thought desirable, and he told himself moodily, as he walked away, that he had gotten himself into trouble now! Why had he been such an idiot as to speak out his passing thoughts?

At home, he had found the state of affairs which has been explained, and had hurried back to town, glad of any excuse which would oblige him to call at the Edmonds's home. On the way he speculated as to what might result from this call. Suppose he should happen to see Marjorie? He could hardly ask for her at so late an hour, but she might be there, and they might have a few minutes' talk together; and a very few minutes might, perhaps, right all wrongs. Yes, he forgot Estelle Douglass entirely, and the words he had spoken to her—that mood had passed; he was in a reverent one now, and called his mother's illness a special interposition of Providence in his behalf. When he rang the bell, he had planned the words which he would speak to Marjorie, feeling

sure that he would see her. Would not Providence take care of that?

And he had seen her standing there under the gas-jet with a strange light on her face, such as he by no means understood. The language of the country whence it was born was utterly unfamiliar to him. Of course he misunderstood the situation. Of course Marjorie and Mr. Maxwell had been spending the evening together, and were taking leave of each other, probably, when he interrupted them. It was her feeling for him which could put such a light into the girl's eyes! The thought made him angry; so bitterly angry, that he could hardly treat her with the outward courtesy which decency demanded. As he rushed away into the night, he thought again of Estelle, and told himself that it was just as well that he had spoken to her as he did. *She* cared for him, at least; and it was more than Marjorie had ever done. There wasn't any such thing as real disinterested love in the world; he had proved it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PRINCIPLES AND PROFESSIONS.

IN due course of time, the first Sabbath in the new year arrived, and Ralph Bramlett succeeded in creating fully as much of a sensation as he had planned. His mother was better, but too ill to think of attending church. This being the case, he had magnanimously decided to tell her of his intentions that Sabbath morning. He had been touched by her way of receiving the news. She was a shy, quiet mother, always dominated by her children, especially by her son. But she had kissed him, a thing she had not seemed to find opportunity to do since he had considered himself a man, and shed a few tears over him, as she told him that he was her dear boy; that she had always known he would be a comfort to her; and that she had long looked forward in the hope of such a day. If she could only be in church to see him received, her bliss would be complete: He had returned the kiss warmly, and assured her that he meant to be a comfort to her, always, in the future, as in the past, and had gone away feeling that he was a good son in every way. That there were not many like him.

As they were driving to church, Ralph thought himself that it might be better to explain matters to his father, lest the surprise be too great for him. Mr. Bramlett was not a professing Christian, but his son had no hesitancy in talking about such topics with him, and felt at no loss for the proper words.

“By the way, father,” he said, just as his father had concluded a sentence about the unusually mild weather they were having for that time of year, “I am to unite with the church to-day; I thought I would perhaps better mention it, lest you might be taken by surprise.”

“Well!” said Mr. Bramlett, the single word bristling with surprise, “I certainly am astonished. I hadn’t thought of such a thing. When did you decide that? It is a sudden move on your part, isn’t it?”

“Not particularly so, sir; my mind was made up some days ago.”

“Well,” said Mr. Bramlett again, after a thoughtful silence, “I suppose I am glad to hear it; I ought to be. - I respect that sort of thing, when it is genuine. I hope you know what you are about, and mean it.”

“I generally know what I am about, I believe,” said Ralph with dignity.

“Yes, you think you do, I am sure. What I mean is, that it would be a serious matter to make any mistakes in this line. It always seemed to me to be a very important thing, this making a

profession of religion ; I know a good many people who don't appear to do anything but profess it ; but there is a genuine kind, and I have seen it. I wouldn't want any other kind myself."

"I don't think I understand you, sir. I trust you do not mean to intimate that I am not in earnest in this matter ; that my kind isn't genuine ?"

"Oh, no, no ; of course not. I didn't mean anything special. I was only trying to put you on your guard. Young people sometimes enter into that sort of thing thoughtlessly, I think. Though you are not one of the thoughtless sort, exactly, either. Well, I hope you will be glad of it."

Silence for a few minutes, then Mr. Bramlett spoke again.—"You will be getting out of your present business pretty soon, won't you ?"

"I don't know why, I am sure." The son spoke testily. "What has my present business to do with it ? I am giving entire satisfaction, I believe, to my employers, and am earning more money than has been earned in a single year on the farm, since I have known it. Why should I undertake to make a change ; at least in these hard times ?"

"Oh, I don't know ; you know what I think about these things, Ralph. I am not a professor of religion, myself, but as a man I have my views. You know I have never looked with satisfaction on this business of yours ; there is something to be considered besides money. It didn't seem to me

that it belonged to a religious profession, to have to do with a distillery."

"If you will excuse the expression, sir, I must say that I consider that utter nonsense! I have no more to do with the distillery than you have. I suppose I would abolish it to-morrow, if I had the power. I am certainly just as much of a temperance man as I ever was in my life; but why not look at these things from a common-sense standpoint, instead of as children? The distillery is in existence, and its bookkeeping has to be done by somebody. Why in the world shouldn't I do it, and get the salary which they are willing to pay for it? There is neither more nor less liquor made because I am keeping the books. I look at that from a purely business point of view. As matters stand with us, I cannot afford to throw away a fifteen-hundred dollar salary for the sake of sentiment."

"Is it mere sentiment, Ralph? Suppose the business were the making of counterfeit money?"

His son gave an irritable twist to his shoulders and prefaced his reply by a contemptuous exclamation which is beyond the scope of orthography. He did not believe that his father's strength consisted in argument. "That strikes me as an exceedingly irrelevant remark, as far from referring to a parallel case as possible; the making of counterfeit money is against the law. The business in which the Snyders are engaged is sustained by the laws of the land; and they occupy an

exceedingly respectable position in the world. If I ever reach as prominent a place as any member of that firm holds, in the world's opinion, I shall have cause to be thankful. It does not seem to be necessary for us to discuss these matters any further, father. My mind is quite made up, and my conscience is entirely at ease. Meantime, the family, you will remember, is profiting by my decision. It would not have been possible for me to have surrounded my mother with as many comforts as I have since she was taken ill, if it had not been for the salary which it seems to be orthodox to despise."

If his aim was to silence his father, he succeeded; Mr. Bramlett was not at any time a man of many words.

The day was beautiful, and the large church was well filled. Those who were not regular in their attendance at any other time, made an effort to get out to the first communion service of the year,—that time which seems to be almost weighed down with the good and *weak* resolutions of the careless and ill at ease.

A larger number than usual of those who were not communicants were present. It had in some way gotten abroad among the young people of their circle that Ralph Bramlett was on that day to be received into the church. In short, nearly everything connected with this new departure of his had worked according to his mind. Dr. Ford upon being notified of the young man's in-

tentions, had expressed his unbounded gratification thereat, and had taken the deepest interest in the whole matter. Among other questions asked, had come this :

“ Do you care to tell me what led you to a consideration of this subject? Or rather, what led you to make the final decision? ”

Over this Ralph had reflected thoughtfully for a few moments, and then had replied that he supposed he might say he had brought himself to the decision. The question had presented itself to him one night, not only as eminently practical, but as one which a reasonable person ought to decide without further delay ; and he had accordingly done so. This reply seemed to impress his pastor exceedingly. He repeated it to the Examining Committee, and remarked that it was an illustration of the power of a cultivated conscience ; and an encouraging reminder of the fact that the truth was working in quiet ways of which they knew nothing. He went home greatly encouraged, and told his wife that young Bramlett was a rather unusual young man ; truly he should think a man of decision and of action. Such a person ought to be a power among young men especially ; he looked to see results from the stand which had been taken that day.

His wife said : “ Bramlett ;—there is but one young man in the Bramlett family, is there? He must be the one who has accepted a clerkship in that great distillery where the Snyders

make their money. A rather strange position for one to take who was contemplating uniting with the church, was it not?"

"Yes," said the minister, thoughtfully. "I suppose this decision came afterwards; I had forgotten that he was employed there. Of course, he is only a bookkeeper; but then,—if he were my son I shouldn't like it. He will probably make a change as soon as he can. Some things are queer, my dear. Perhaps we should not expect too much of young men who have to earn their own living. I learned the other day that our Mr. Bemus, who has been a member of this church for at least thirty years, is the probable owner, not only of that large hotel on the corner of Bond and Belmont Streets but of the café and saloon connected with it, on the other corner.

"Is it possible!" said Mrs. Ford. "Still, an owner seems a little different, doesn't it? He doesn't run the hotel."

"No, he only leases it for a very large sum, and pockets the money. Some of it he puts into our church; quite a good deal, indeed; he is benevolently inclined, you know. The hotel is chiefly famous for the choice wines and liquors which it furnishes its guests. What can we look for from the Ralph Bramletts of the world, when the church sets them such brilliant examples?"

He sighed as he spoke. He was a young minister, and had not been long in this pastorate; and every day gave him some fresh item to consider.

There were times when he could not but feel that the problems of life were thickening around him. Oh, for young strong men to lean upon and to lead into the thick of the conflict! Would Ralph Bramlett prove such an one?

The Examining Committee had decided that his examination was eminently satisfactory. So was his public reception. It was, as he had supposed it would be, more marked, because of his coming entirely alone. One or two of the brethren had commented on that; they said it showed independence of character, and a strong conviction of his duty. It cannot be denied that, as the young man stood before the altar listening to and giving grave assent to the articles of faith which that church held, he looked in all respects the model. More than one mother thought so, and sighed, and wished that their sons could have stood beside him; some of them thought that his mother ought to have been there to see. They gathered about him after service, old friends, and many new ones, and shook hands, and congratulated him, and themselves; some of them spoke earnest words of advice; old men in the church, who held his hand in a firm grasp as they did so; and he bent his head toward them and listened with deference, and honestly meant to profit by their words, and looked handsome and distinguished, and—could not forget that he did!

When he had first planned this entire scene, it was Mrs. Edmonds and her daughter whom he had

especially meant to impress. He hardly knew what he had expected from them. It happened that their seat was across the church from the one that he occupied, as far removed from his, indeed, as space would permit; and during the period of their estrangement, it had not seemed strange that they had not even exchanged bows, on Sundays; but on this day it was all to be different, he had meant to put himself directly in their way. Once he had planned to hold out his hand to Mrs. Edmonds and gravely and magnanimously forgive her for all the supposed evil which she had done him. On New Year's day he had almost decided not to make that proposed call, in order to have the excitement of the first meeting on that eventful Sabbath. Finding himself not willing to wait for this, he had compromised. If Marjorie should happen not to be at home, then he would wait until Sunday, and looking at her with grave reproachful eyes as he held out his hand to her, would say: "May I walk with you a little way, as we used to do, in the old times?"

But all these plans had been utterly and hopelessly destroyed. He was a person of consideration, but the ones for whom he had planned, cared nothing about it. He met them in the aisle, it is true; he had been determined that he would—and bestowed upon Mrs. Edmonds the most dignified of bows, keeping its counterpart for Marjorie; then, at just the right moment, when it would be impossible for her not to hear, he had said to the

young lady in front of her: "Estelle, wait for me a moment, please. I must speak with old Mr. Crawford."

He had put an air of quiet command into his tone, as one who had the right to direct her movements; and Estelle's expressive face had responded delightfully to his power. Did Marjorie understand? It was the only thing he could think of, to show her that he was not crushed. Poor Ralph!

If his aim had been to astonish Marjorie, it is almost a pity that he could not have known how thoroughly he had accomplished it. It happened that she had not heard of his intention, until his name was announced in the church. One who was watching her might have noticed that as she caught the name the blood rolled in waves over her face, and then as quickly receded, leaving her very pale. Indeed her surprise amounted almost to dismay; her own decision in regard to this matter had been so very recent, and her experience so brief, that the thought of recognition by the visible church had not even, as yet, occurred to her. Almost immediately, however, she had thought of Ralph; had recalled what Glyde had said about her influencing him; and had wondered in what ways she could bring that influence to bear upon him even now, so that he might be won for Christ. All those first days of her Christian life this may have been said to have been her study. A brave and loyal study. Every thought

of influence which she had planned to bring to bear upon him, she had resolved must come through Estelle Douglass. She must reach and influence her. Estelle was a church member, and could therefore be approached on the subject with some hope, at least that she would be interested. And if she could be led to feel as Glyde did, for instance, of course her thought and prayer would be for Ralph. Such was Marjorie's plan, and she had prayed long about it that morning. A peculiar prayer; chiefly a cry to this newly-found powerful Friend of hers, to take from her heart the feeling of aversion for Estelle Douglass which had grown upon her of late, and help her to love her, and be intimate with her, and to try in all wise kind ways to help her Christ-ward. She prayed that she might want to do this for her sake, and not alone for Ralph Bramlett's. Coming from such a prayer, it struck her strangely, almost bewilderingly that this young man for whose soul she had wrestled, was far ahead of her; was actually being received that day into the church, and she had not known that he had ever given this subject a serious thought! Strangely enough this seemed to remove him still farther from her. If he had, during their estrangement, passed through the experience which had just come to her, without a thought of her in it all, with no desire to help her, then indeed he must have gotten very *very* far away from the old friendship. Once more she asked herself the sorrowful question why

he could not in it all have acted like a friend? She thought about it sorrowfully during the walk home, while her mother and Mr. Maxwell talked together. How strange it all was! Such a little time ago that she and Ralph had gone, that November morning, in search of nuts, and pleasure; and had spent one of their gayest and happiest days together; then, he had acted so strangely that evening, and then—she had not exchanged a dozen words with him since, and the gulf was widening every hour between them! Could she even be friends with Estelle, and try to help, through her? Perhaps, for some reason he did not want even this. How very strangely he had acted! Since he was a man and had a right to speak, why had he not come to her frankly, and told her the story of his discoveries, and asked her to rejoice with him in his new plans and hopes? She thought that she could have done it. She had put herself so entirely into the background, that for the time-being she believed herself ready to rejoice with him in anything that gave him joy. How unaccountable it was that it had seemed to him necessary to put this old friend of his so utterly away from him that he could not even clasp hands with her on this morning of mornings! She had it in her heart to say: “Ralph I am so glad! God bless you.” And he had given her no chance.

Arriving at home, she went directly to her room, and closed and locked her door, and locked the

communicating door, and sat down on a low chair by the window, which was her favorite seat, and hid her face in her hands. She shed no tears : she was rarely given to tears. Be glad for her, that after a few minutes of intense and nerve-straining silence, she slipped from her chair to her knees. She believed that life was thorn-spread for her ; but she had found a Comforter.

In the parlor was Mr. Maxwell, looking for a book, and preparing to pass the brief interval of time which intervened between the church service and his going out for his dinner. Contrary to her usual custom, Mrs. Edmonds lingered also. She had seen the look on her daughter's face ; she knew that she must be left alone ; that even the sound of some one moving about in that other room would be, perhaps, a pain to her. So she waited below, moving restlessly from one point to another ; taking up and laying down first a book, then a paper. Presently, seeing Mr. Maxwell's inquiring eyes upon her, she laughed a little consciously.

" I am really developing nerves in my old age ! " she said. " I hardly know why I should feel so disturbed. One thing I am afraid of ; that I am growing suspicious and cruel in my judgments. I have no good reason for it, but I *cannot* believe in the sincerity of that young man who was received into the church to-day. I hope I may be doing him injustice, but I really could not feel

as though there was anything but the merest form about it all."

He did not laugh, in response, as she had half-expected that he would, but, instead, dropped the book at which he had been looking, and began a slow thoughtful walk up and down the room, his face grave, almost sad. At last he stopped before her, still grave.

"Perhaps we are both growing over-critical," he said. "I must frankly confess to you that, without sufficient cause, it may be, I have very much the same feeling. I have seen—a little of the young man, lately, and I must own that the service this morning, the part of it with which he was connected, gave me only pain. We have too many church-members now whose entire moral standard is low. Still, of course, we may both be mistaken; let us hope and pray that it may prove so."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SENTIMENTALISM AND FANATICISM.

As Marjorie had expected, very early in the week which followed that eventful Sabbath, came Estelle Douglass with her confidences.

“O Marjorie!” she began, as soon as they were left alone together, “I have something to tell you; a secret for nobody but you, as yet; and it is about something so wonderful to have happened to me!”

Then had followed in detail the story which Marjorie had been sure she would hear. A story so glorified by being drawn through the channel of Estelle’s heart, that Ralph himself would not have recognized it. The commonplace words which had been spoken, as it will be remembered he had admitted to himself, on the impulse of the moment, had sounded to Estelle’s eager ears like the most passionate appeal; in full belief in her honesty, she was so translating it to Marjorie.

“And I was so astonished!” she said. “Oh, you cannot imagine what a surprise it was! You see, it all came upon me so suddenly, Why, I have been for years in the habit of supposing that you

and Ralph were—if not formally engaged, at least so sure of each other that you did not think of anybody else. Though Ralph and I have always been good friends, you know, and I could not help noticing that of late he has taken the trouble to seek me out more than he used to. I didn't understand it, and was anxious and troubled. Actually, Marjorie, I was anxious about you, some of the time! But when Ralph explained to me that that was all the merest nonsense, and that you and he had never been anything to each other but real good friends, nor had thought of any other relation in your lives, why, it made everything look entirely different. Marjorie, you who know him so well, must be ready to congratulate me, I am sure. Isn't it strange that after being brought up in the same town, as we have been, going to school together, and all that sort of thing, and you and Ralph being so exceedingly intimate all these years, that all of a sudden, one may say, he decided that I must be his special friend for life! Still, that is not so surprising after all, when one thinks of it. People rarely marry those with whom they were intimate in childhood and early boyhood; extremely intimate, I mean. But I certainly was very much deceived, and I think other people have been. Why, Marjorie, almost everybody thought you were engaged to Ralph Bramlett. If you had cared, dear, I never could have listened to him, of course. I don't know what I should have done. But I am so

glad to know that it has all turned out just right in every way."

She was very sincere. Her heart was full of love and desire for all humankind. She had not the slightest wish to hurt Marjorie. Why should she have? She was sincerely and heartily glad over her supposed discovery that there had been always an understanding of friendship between Ralph and her school-girl friend, and that Marjorie was at least on the verge of a very satisfactory settlement of her own future.

She was a girl of a vivid imagination in some directions, and had been given, all her life, to the habit of doing much planning ahead. During the short time since there had been what she called an "understanding" between Ralph and herself, she had indulged in her favorite habit. One query was, whether she and Marjorie were not sufficiently intimate friends to plan their marriages for the same day. The ceremonies could be performed in the church, thus giving their very large circle of acquaintances opportunity to be present; it would be peculiarly appropriate, too, she thought, since Ralph and Marjorie were such old and very intimate friends. To unite their forces would give each the opportunity to make a better display than either could do alone. Yes, she said "display" in connection with it. She would not have been Estelle Douglass if she had not. "One does not plan to be married but once in a lifetime," she told herself. "Why shouldn't one have

everything as grand as possible? Marjorie and I would look well together; we are sufficiently unlike to offset each other's appearance." Of course it would not do to talk about it yet; she must wait for Marjorie's confidence, and even then, she must suggest it to Ralph before talking it over with Marjorie; because, she admitted to her secret self, he was inclined to have a mind of his own, and it might occur to him to dislike the entire plan. She must wait. Besides, of course she could not speak of the details of marriage until Ralph had hinted that there was such an event in expectation.

With these thoughts in mind, though she would not for the world have allowed them to appear on the surface, Estelle closed her confidence by asking what she meant to be a very pointed question.

"And now, Marjorie dear, I have chosen you, you see, for my most confidential friend; told you every little particular, almost; and I haven't told anybody else, outside of our own family. Ralph says he has a horror of people gossiping about our affairs, and I certainly agree with him, but you are different from other people. I told him that I would like to tell you all about it, and he agreed that that was a very different matter from talking to people in general. Why, you and he are almost like brother and sister, aren't you? What a disagreeable sister he has, by the way; I never could endure Hannah Bramlett. But what I was going to ask you, dear, was, Haven't you a story to tell

me? We ought to be very intimate friends now, you and I. I am sure you must have something nice to tell me in return."

"Yes," said Marjorie, a grave sweetness in tone and manner, "I have. I thought when I saw you coming to-day that I would like to tell you my story; and I have a special desire to do so, after hearing yours. Something very wonderful has come to me, Estelle. After living in indifference toward Him all these years, I have suddenly learned the value of a Friend who has been calling after me, asking my trust and my allegiance. He has been very patient with neglect and almost insult on my part, and has waited for me. At last I have listened to His call and given myself to Him. I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, Estelle, forever."

Said Estelle, "Dear me! Do you mean that you have made up your mind to join the church? What a queer way you have of telling it! You don't do anything like anybody else, Marjorie, do you?" The slow color mounted in Marjorie's face. Was there any use in coming to Estelle Douglass, with confidences like these? Still she tried.

"As I said, Estelle, I have a special desire to talk with you about this now. I realize how much more you and Ralph can be to each other because you both belong to Christ. How very, very glad you must have been to have seen him take the stand which he did last Sunday."

Estelle regarded her with curious, wondering

eyes; this was so unlike the story which she had expected to hear.

“Yes,” she said, after a moment, “of course, I was glad. It was very nice of him to join the church. How splendid he looked, didn’t he? I heard ever so many speak of it. I have always thought him fine-looking, but I never saw him look so well as he did last Sunday. That is the most becoming suit of clothes he ever had, and I think it was nice in him to wear it then for the first time; it showed such respect for the service, you know. Oh, I was delighted, you may be sure; but awfully surprised.

“I didn’t know a thing about it until I heard his name announced from the pulpit! Glyde came home from somewhere, the night before, with a story to the effect that he was going to be received, the next day; but I laughed at it; I said people were always talking about Ralph, and that that was the last idea they had gotten up. I thought of course he would have mentioned it, or that I should have heard of it in some way, if there had been any foundation for the report. Wasn’t it queer in him to keep it so private, even from me? Did you know anything about it, beforehand, Marjorie?”

“No,” said Marjorie, glad for Estelle’s sake that she could answer promptly in the negative; but dismayed to think that these two were beginning their life together in this way. How extraordinary that Ralph should not want to talk it all over

with the one whom he had chosen; explaining to her the wonderful revelation which he must have had, and the solemn conclusions which he must have reached about many things! It was not like Ralph to be so reticent. "I tell you everything," he had said to her, not six months before. "A plan is only half formed in my mind before I have to rush off to you with the story of it." She had rejoiced in his confidences; she was not, like Estelle, given to making or receiving them; she had felt that she was Ralph's only confidential friend; but now that he had changed everything, of course that entire oneness of feeling, which had seemed to be between him and herself, ought to be a mark of this new relation which he had formed. Actually she began to be anxious for them! No, not for them, for *him*. She wanted him to begin entirely right and to be entirely happy. Her love for him had by no means turned to bitterness; she must name it "friendship" hereafter, but it was honest, earnest friendship. Every good gift that earth had to bestow, she claimed for him; she believed in him as thoroughly as ever girl believed in man. He had done wrong, she felt, in not trusting her, in not being sure that she would be his friend and helper though she was to be nothing more; but that was because she had not shown him plainly enough her better nature, so that he could dare to trust it; if she had seemed selfish and exacting to him he could not help that. She wanted all womanly graces for Estelle, because she was his

promised wife. She wanted to love her, help her ; she yearned over her almost as a mother might over a child ; suddenly Estelle, who was two years older than herself, seemed young and ignorant of the world compared with herself.

“Perhaps he wanted to give you a beautiful surprise,” she said, speaking part of her thought aloud. “Estelle, I am glad for you that Ralph has settled the question of all questions. You will be able to help each other in a truer sense than you could have done without this ; and to help other people : there is so much to be done in the world. It seems strange that I never realized it before. I don’t think Ralph will be a half-hearted Christian. I look for him to be a power in the church ; for both of you have great influence.”—She added this last part of the sentence hastily. “What good times you and he can have, reading and studying the Bible together, and praying, and planning your work for Christ together.”

There was an exalted light in her eyes as she spoke, and no tremble of her lips ; she had not for nothing spent half the night praying over this entire matter.

“Estelle,” she added earnestly, “begin right ; don’t make the mistake of putting Ralph first ; that is natural for us women ; we have to watch it ; put Christ first, and live a strong life for Him. It is in that way that you can best help your husband. My religion means so much to me. I have known this powerful Friend of mine but a few days, and

yet it seems as though He had accomplished great things for me already. Excuse me if I seem to be giving advice; I am inclined to forget that other people know Him much better than I do."

Estelle laughed a little in a half-embarrassed way. "You are an enthusiast," she said. "You remind me of Glyde; she has gotten some new and queer ideas since she went to New York. By the way, the child had a talk with Ralph, don't you think! The idea! and I had never dared to open my lips to him on the subject. I must ask him now just what she said. It was before we were engaged. Why, Marjorie, of course we will live as Christian people ought to, when we live together; that is a time away in the distance I presume; we have not begun to plan for it. But I do not think that I was ever intended—to be—well, to get into a fever of enthusiasm about matters of this kind. I'm a plain, practical person; I believe in doing church-work, of course, and in being identified with all its interests, in a reasonable way. If I had any money to give, I should like to give it through the church; I always thought that would be great fun. Ralph will have to do that part; I shouldn't wonder if he would be a rich man one of these days, Marjorie. Despite his anxiety to study law, he is developing into quite a business man. Father heard that young Mr. Snyder say that he was the best book-keeper they ever had; and that they meant to

hold on to him and make it worth his while to stay with them."

"Nothing could make it worth his while," said Marjorie, with a sudden flash of indignation which was more like her old self than anything Estelle had seen that morning. "I do not believe he will remain there; I do not see how any motives which have to do with money-making, or mere business advantages can have weight with him now. He owes it to his position as a Christian, to throw his entire influence on the side of right, and while he is engaged in helping to manage such a business as the Snyders' he cannot do this."

"Oh, well," said Estelle rather coldly, "people have different ways of looking at these things. I never saw anything very wrong about his being bookkeeper in an establishment; he has nothing whatever to do with the business; if he were offered a partnership, that might be another matter; but as it is, that is being sentimental, Marjorie; Ralph isn't sentimental. I wonder you and he got along together so long as you did, for you are very much so. I think Ralph has a splendid streak of real good common-sense, and that he showed it when he refused to stay around home and wait for an opportunity to his mind, but went right to work in the first place that opened for him. He has done some very nice things for his mother since he began to get a regular salary. I don't know how they would have gotten along, now that she is sick, without his help. There are

worse things in the world than a fifteen-hundred-dollar salary, and I should think none the worse of Ralph for looking twice at it before he decided to give it up for a mere sentiment. Still, there is no use in our discussing it. Ralph has a mind of his own, and will do as he likes. You made that discovery some time ago, didn't you?"

On the whole, the talk closed most unsatisfactorily. Estelle went home feeling annoyed over what she chose to consider a criticism of Ralph; all the more sensitive, be it confessed, because her father had expressed himself frankly as disapproving of a distillery-clerk for a son-in-law. As for Marjorie, there was a sinking feeling at her heart that Estelle was not calculated, in the truest sense of the word, to be a help to Ralph Bramlett. There was also a dreary fear that she would not be able to help either of them, in the ways in which she had tried to plan.

In point of fact, she had little opportunity to try to help them. The intimacy which both girls had sincerely intended to cultivate, did not make progress. Marjorie took an early opportunity to return Estelle's call, and was quite as friendly but social as she knew how to be, but already there had come to Estelle a mysterious change. She said nothing about their being confidential friends, or of Marjorie being like a sister to Ralph. She talked much about that young man, it is true, speaking of him always with a certain air of appropriation which would have been amusing, if Mar-

jorie had felt like being amused, but at the same time with a certain reticence as regarded his affairs, which was as new as it was mysterious. Neither would she allow herself to be approached in the slightest degree upon the religious side of her nature.

“You were not at prayer-meeting last evening?” began Marjorie, by way of trying to introduce the thoughts which were uppermost in her mind.

“No. Ralph had a headache and was nearly tired to death. I told him I did not think it was his duty to attend the prayer-meeting, while he was kept at business as late as he was last night. There is something besides prayer-meetings to be thought of in this world. I just squarely coaxed him to stay with me, instead;” she said this with a little defiant toss of her head, as though she expected Marjorie to disagree with her, and would rather enjoy having her do so,—“he spoke of prayer-meeting, and said perhaps we ought to go; and I said perhaps we ought not to do any such thing, that I had been a member of the church a good deal longer than he had, and ought to be the better judge. I don’t believe you can make either of us into fanatics, Marjorie,”—with a little unmusical laugh. “I told Ralph something of what you said the other day; what do you suppose was his reply? He said you were the sort of material of which they used to make martyrs in the times when martyrs were fashionable. But he and I are not; we are real flesh-and-blood beings. Glyde,

now, is developing into a regular fanatic; she will be a disciple after your own heart. Last night there was a little gathering at the Gardners, new people, you know, and very choice. Harmon Gardner seems really to have taken quite a fancy to Glyde. She was invited last night; only a dozen or twenty young people were honored, even Fanny and I were not invited, no one but Glyde; and Harmon Gardner wanted to call for her and take her there. Do you believe the child would not go? Simply because it was prayer-meeting night! Mother told her she thought she might be excused under such special circumstances; she hasn't been going out much, you know, and this was a choice opportunity. Even Ralph tried to influence her: he told her she was standing in her own light; and that she must allow her judgment to come in to help settle some matters. It was all of no sort of use. She was just as firm as any little martyr you ever heard of. Not a step would she go, and she told Harmon Gardner the reason. He called early in the evening to see if he might come for her at the proper time, and she got it off to him just as though it was an excuse that he could appreciate! It was the regular prayer-meeting evening in her church, and she had resolved not to let anything but necessity interfere with her going.

“‘I am very sorry,’ I heard him say in a disappointed tone, ‘I wish this were a necessity’: he acted as though he did not care whether the other

guests came or not. I was provoked with Glyde. Ralph says Harmon Gardner is a very superior young man; but that is what happens to people when they get fanatical, Marjorie, they take leave of their common-sense. I shall have to confess that I'm glad Ralph isn't of that sort. By the way, that reminds me of his sister. You wouldn't have picked her out for a religious fanatic, would you? Notwithstanding the fact that she looks as though she had been a martyr all her days, but she has taken up a new rôle very lately. Nobody knows what has started her; she wants to go out to the Mission on Sunday afternoons; wants Ralph to drive her there, and wait while she picks up somebody to teach. The idea! the only day of rest that he has. He told her it was out of the question for him to spend his Sabbath time in that way, and that if she got there, she must walk. She was quite wrought up about it, he says. She has gotten an idea that she ought to be doing somebody some good. Suppose you go and call upon her, Marjorie? Perhaps you will find her just to your mind."

CHAPTER XXV.

OPPORTUNITIES.

THE last sentence had closed with the most disagreeable form of Estelle's disagreeable little laugh, and Marjorie had gone away a few minutes thereafter, wondering sorrowfully what could have come between them since their last talk together. Estelle had been indifferent enough then, but not almost bitter.

Could it be that she had an unfortunate way of talking about religious matters, which awakened the prejudices of others? And were Ralph and Estelle between them going to make little Glyde's life a trial, instead of a joy to herself and a blessing to others?

She was right in her impression of a barrier having been set up between Estelle and herself, since their last meeting. Many of her words on that occasion had been reported to Ralph; not carefully, for Estelle was not by nature a careful reporter. As has been said before, she gave often her *impression* of facts, instead of the facts themselves.

Therefore the unpleasant impression she had received from Marjorie's criticism of Ralph's business, was duly reported in such a way that

they made Ralph's dark face flush, and his eyes look fierce. For instance, this: "Don't you believe, Ralph, she says you cannot be a Christian, because you are a clerk in a distillery! Did you ever hear of such absurd nonsense?"

"Indeed!" he had said haughtily. "What am I then? A hypocrite?" After hearing all that Estelle had to tell, he had said with almost an air of authority, "I think, my dear, that the less you have to do in the future with that young woman the better it will be for you and for all concerned. She is evidently not the Marjorie we used to know intimately; constant fellowship with a fanatic and a prig are making their impress upon her. She has chosen her own ways and must be allowed to go in them; it will be just as agreeable, perhaps, if our ways do not lie in the same direction."

And then Estelle, who had fancied that he would like it if she would be very intimate with Marjorie, immediately changed her intention, somewhat relieved thereat; admitting, not only to herself but to him, that Marjorie was not quite to her mind. She liked her, of course, as did all the girls, but then she had always been "queer," and was queerer now, since she had taken up these peculiar ideas with regard to religion.

"She has become simply an echo of Mr. Maxwell," she added laughing. "It is undoubtedly his influence which has so changed her; he is, as you say, a fanatic; I have not exchanged a dozen sentences with him, but I can see that. I wonder

if your influence will be as forceful over me as his is over her? At least I am glad that you are not fanatically inclined. Well, I shall have as little to do with her as politeness will permit."

So it came to pass that, after this exchange of calls, there were days, even weeks together, when the two did not meet. Marjorie had by no means cast off either Estelle or Ralph; she had prayed and was praying for them too earnestly to do this; she thought about them a great deal; always coupling their names in her thoughts, with a resolute determination which would have been pitiful to one who could understand the human heart; loyalty in *thought* as well as in action was a necessity to a nature like hers.

She watched for the two, each week, in the prayer-meeting; but they did not come. Part of the time it was head-ache and disinclination; but often, so far as Ralph was concerned, it was genuine detention at his place of business. As the weeks went by, and he succeeded in proving himself a success in his work, more and more heavy responsibility was laid upon him, and more entirely was he trusted; this was all very pleasant from one point of view, but it made his work hard, and his evenings sometimes short and full of anxiety.

Meantime, Marjorie received, one day, an unexpected call from Hannah Bramlett. She had never been intimate with this young woman, chiefly perhaps because of the disparity in their ages; and while she had not shared the manifest dislike of

Estelle Douglass she yet confessed to herself that she did not feel drawn to the girl in any way. Intimate as she had been with Ralph during these many years, she and his sister had not exchanged a dozen calls in their lives, and of late had had hardly even a speaking acquaintance. It was therefore with surprise, and a little nervous query as to why she had come and what they should talk about, that Marjorie went down to receive her.

“I have been wanting to come and see you for a week or two,” began Hannah abruptly, as soon as the ordinary civilities had been exchanged. “I wanted to have a talk with you. I heard you had been converted; is it so? Why, I know it must be so; you go to prayer-meeting every week now, they say, and have taken a class in Sunday-school. I want to teach in the Sunday-school, but there is no one to go with me anywhere; I wish there were; or else that women did not have to be hedged in by all sorts of rules. Well, that’s not what I came for. What I wanted to talk with you about was—doing things. The church Sunday-school comes at a time when I can’t leave home; mother isn’t well; she doesn’t get her strength back; she was a good deal sicker than they thought that time when I was away; I have to look after things a good deal that she used to see to herself; so I’m needed just at Sunday-school time. Now what is there that I can do? Perhaps you will wonder why I don’t ask my own brother,

since I've come to a beginner, and he is one ; but the truth is he hasn't your kind of beginning ; his is Estelle Douglass's kind, and that's a pity, I think. He is in earnest ; at least I hope he is ; but he is young and busy, and easily influenced ; and Estelle Douglass isn't the sort of girl to influence a young man like that in the right way. It is a pity to have to say so ; I oughtn't to do it, perhaps, since they are engaged to each other ; but I'm not saying it out on the street ; you know them both. I used to think, Marjorie, that you were to be my sister ; and I always liked the notion. Excuse me for speaking of it," she added deprecatingly, as she saw the red on Marjorie's cheeks deepen and spread, " I don't mean to be rude ; they have always called me blunt, and I suppose I am. I never succeed in saying the right things somehow. What I mean is, that you seem different from other girls ; you always have been, for that matter, and I thought you would be a different kind of a Christian from others. I have never been satisfied with my religion. It is genuine, I think, what I've got of it ; but you can't keep a thing like that corked up all the while, and do nothing for anybody else, and have it amount to much. Oh, I know there is work at home ; that is what Dr. Ford tells me ; but it is work that I can't do ; except housework and things of that kind. I can do plenty of that, and *do* do it ; I'm not planning to shirk it ; but I want a little bit of the other kind ; just enough to

keep me alive. Mother is a Christian woman if ever there was one, and she doesn't need any doing for, in that line; and father,—well, there isn't a living thing I can do for him, except to make him as comfortable as I know how, and look after his clothes, and all that. Father is bound up in Ralph, and Ralph can influence him, but I can't; he doesn't even think I'm grown up yet, though I am going on to twenty-seven years. He just thinks of me as a little girl who ought to stay at home and mind her mother, and be good. And mother thinks that I am hard on Ralph because I see his faults, and speak of them once in awhile, when I love every hair of his head better than I do my whole body! I'd die for him, any time. But there! that's nothing to do with what I want to talk about. The point is, Marjorie, isn't there a living thing for me to do in the world for somebody? I get so downright sick of myself sometimes, that it doesn't seem as though I could endure myself any longer. I thought when Ralph joined the church, perhaps it would be different: perhaps he would go to work at something somewhere, and I could get in. I thought about his coming home early on prayer-meeting nights and me having his supper ready, and he driving back to town and taking me along; but he doesn't do anything of the kind. Half the time he can't help it; he has to stay at that old distillery so late that he loses all the early trains; and a good deal of the time he doesn't come home at all, until eleven or

twelve o'clock; he stops at Douglasses', and has his supper there, and lounges in their back parlor, and is petted by Estelle; that is natural, too, of course; I have no business to find fault with it; but it isn't the way I planned. Nothing ever was, or ever will be, I presume. But I just thought that I would come and have a talk with you, and ask if you knew anything in life that a body like me could do. Isn't there a poor girl, or a poor boy somewhere, who hasn't any friends, whom even I could help?"

Marjorie regarded her caller with the deepest interest and sympathy; this was different from any Hannah Bramlett that she had known. Her talk sounded like the cry of a hungry soul. Would it be possible, for one who felt the need of being herself set to work, to help this other one?

"There are people enough who need your help," she said at last, "if we only knew where to find them; with so much to be done in the world it is an infinite pity that one who is willing to work should not find the people, and the opportunity. The people who need helping are more easily found than the opportunity. I have been thinking all the morning of one who is in sore need; but how to reach him in any way, I haven't the least idea.

"Have you ever heard of a man by the name of Jack Taylor? I have become painfully interested in him quite lately. It is only a short time since

he buried his wife. While she lay dead in the house, he reeled home intoxicated, not knowing what had happened. It was a terrible shock to him, sobered him at once; he has been in a wretched condition ever since. It seems that the poor fellow loved her, in spite of his treatment of her; and now that it can do her no good he is trying to reform; but it is going to be very hard work. He is utterly discouraged; he feels that he has disgraced himself in the eyes of all who know him, and that he has no friends."

"I know a Jack Taylor, by sight," said Hannah, "but he cannot be the one you are talking about; this one is a mere boy. I noticed him a few days ago passing our house and asked father who he was; he said he was a worthless fellow whose name was Jack Taylor; he had secured work at the Simmons' place, that is half a mile or so beyond us; but he supposed he wouldn't keep it long, because he didn't stay sober twenty-four hours at a time; the character fits the one you know, but this fellow cannot be more than nineteen."

"It is the same one," said Marjorie. "He looks like a boy, and is a boy in fact: not twenty-two yet, though he has been married nearly two years. We heard that he had gotten work at the Simmons' place; I do hope he can keep it. If he did not have to pass a dozen saloons on his way out there, I should have more hope of him. He goes back and forth, you say? I wonder if it would not be possible for them to let him sleep there nights,

so that he would not be subject to so much temptation?"

"I don't know," said Hannah. "I wonder if it can be possible that that poor fellow is a widower! It is a pity to have so young a life wasted. I couldn't help noticing him as he passed, he looked so utterly discouraged; as though he had lost all hope in the world. I might set a trap for him at our house, perhaps, and have him stop in, and get a little acquainted."

"I wish you would," said Marjorie earnestly. "Perhaps that is your opportunity. Somebody will have to help him, and that very soon, if he is to be saved. Wouldn't it be a glorious thing if you could lead him to the only One who can save him?"

She was touched to see how Hannah's face brightened; the woman was actually longing to be of use in the world.

"I might try it," she said, rising to go, and speaking with half-suppressed eagerness, as though she could hardly wait for the opportunity, "I never have helped anybody, so far as I know, and I don't suppose I know how, but he looks miserable enough for me to make the trial; I couldn't make matters worse than they are now, at least."

She went away with a brisk step, and Marjorie prayed for Jack Taylor that night with more faith than she had been able to exercise before.

During the weeks which followed, life settled

with Marjorie into a sort of routine; not by any means, however, a stagnation. She set herself resolutely at work to be systematic and faithful in all that she undertook. She planned her days with utmost care; she began to give regular attention to her music once more; and took up a neglected study of German, with Mr. Maxwell for a tutor. In one way or another she and her mother continued to see much of Mr. Maxwell; nothing could be more natural or unpremeditated on their part than this, since he was a lodger in their own house, and spent much of his time at home.

The evening readings continued, and broadened in their scope; not popular books alone—so-called—but real mental studies came in for their share of attention; books which Mr. Maxwell was reading in line with his work, and which he insisted were much better appreciated when he had an audience. Then, a very earnestly-put question from Marjorie when she met him in the hall one morning, concerning the best ways of reading and studying the Bible, led him to ask, soon afterwards, if she and her mother would be willing to join him in a systematic course of Bible study, which he had laid out for himself. He had planned to give one hour of each evening to it, to accomplish as much as he could in that time, and then turn resolutely away from it. He added with a smile, that he had discovered the study of the Bible to be the most fascinating of all pursuits, and that, unless he hedged

himself in with hours and minutes, he was very much given to neglecting other work for this favorite study.

Nothing that he had heretofore proposed had given Marjorie so much satisfaction. She felt more or less able to pursue other studies by herself; but had been astonished and humiliated to discover what a very child she was in her knowledge of the Bible. A multitude of verses she knew, and great was the help and comfort which she derived from them. But any consecutive knowledge of the Book as a book, or as a compilation of many authors, or as a history reaching over a long period of time, she found she had not. It came to pass, therefore, that every otherwise disengaged evening was systematically appropriated in this way, and the back parlor of the Edmonds's home became to all intents and purposes a school-room.

The Bible study came first; they gave it the best of their evening, from seven until eight o'clock; and they grew so interested in their work, both mother and daughter, that very often Mr. Maxwell's inexorable closing of the books as the mantel clock tolled eight was met by reproachful looks from them both. From eight to nine they took up the historical study which Mr. Maxwell was pursuing in a line with his writing. Very delightful study it was to Marjorie, and, apparently, quite as satisfactory to her mother. But the daughter often had qualms of conscience,

when alone, over the thought that their teacher must surely be wasting very valuable time upon them. It was eminently courteous in him to call it "study" for himself, but nothing was more apparent than that he was already thoroughly conversant with his theme. No question that she could ask, found him unprepared; and he welcomed questions so eagerly and was so thorough in his replies, and led them so constantly into other lines of thought, that while they made comparatively little progress with the text book, Marjorie realized that she was gaining a very great deal out of the hour. Once or twice she hinted her fears, but he met them graciously; assuring her that he was getting out of those evenings, much more than he could explain to her, and that to review some of his former work in this direction was exactly the help which he needed for his book; of course, after that there was nothing more to be said.

From nine until ten they "recreated" as Mr. Maxwell called it. Always there was some standard popular book to be taken up; and with these three to take up a book meant not a hurried reading, getting over the ground for the sake merely of the plot, after the manner of superficial novel readers. They read for the sake of the ideas and the language, even more than for the plot; nay, they read more for the moral lessons, or for the moral power evolved from the characters they studied, than they did for either of

these other reasons; the consequence was that they stopped and studied over what they read, comparing views, and considering theories of their own which the book suggested; so that, as Mr. Maxwell said gaily, one evening, "We are making books, as well as reading them. Occasionally I have the egotism to think that if we should write out our conversations carefully, we might chance to make a book which the world would like to read, and be the better for the reading, which is much more important. It would be very easy to write a book which the world would like to read, if one did not care how one influenced that world."

The German lessons came, on what Mr. Maxwell announced was a leisure hour of his afternoons. On the whole, what with the work in the missionary society she had joined, and looking after the seven girls in her Sunday-school class, Marjorie's time was quite fully employed. Of course, though they two lived alone and quite simply, there were more or less duties in the housekeeping line which fell to Marjorie. This had always been the case; and so far was she from disliking such work that she had rather prided herself upon her skill in that direction. The taste grew upon her rather than decreased, and she planned and executed many a dainty dish for Mr. Maxwell to carry to some of his numerous friends. Especially did the old Professor and his wife have reason to rejoice in her constantly de-

veloping fondness for culinary matters. Not a week passed without some choice concoction of hers finding its way to their little round table, at which Mr. Maxwell confessed that he often made a third. The old gentleman used to be his favorite teacher away back in his early boyhood, and his love for, and faith in him had increased with his increasing years. He admitted that he found a conversation with him now, a better stimulus than almost anything else within his reach. So Marjorie planned liberally for three, and often packed with her own careful hands, the basket which was to furnish the entire supper for the trio.

Of course she was not without her hours for recreation ; they began to take long walks together, as the spring opened—she and her mother. And more and more frequently as the days grew sunnier, and the roads dryer, did Selim appear at the gate, attached to a low, wide-seated carriage, while his owner explained that he had an errand on the foundry road, or the river road, or in the direction of the park, and was very tired of driving alone ; would not Mrs. Edmonds and Miss Edmonds keep him company ? It was always Mrs. Edmonds whom he asked first, and she always went. They were really constantly together, mother and daughter, during those days ; their companionship seeming more like that of an elder and younger sister. If Mrs. Edmonds sometimes sacrificed her own tastes and inclinations and gave herself to

walks, and drives, when she would rather have stayed quietly at home, she made no sign, but lived in the joy of her daughter's systematic, cheerful energy. For Marjorie was cheerful from morning till night. It is true her face was more often grave than otherwise, and her mother missed something of the merry playfulness which used to sparkle out on the slightest provocation, but there was no lack of cheer. It was a sweet strong gravity, with not a trace of sullenness in it; and she made her life so busy and so regular that there was little time for brooding. She had been resolute about many things, and made her own little sacrifices, too, of which she said nothing. That communicating door was opened early now, each night; she wrote no words at all in her diary, and she would not let herself think connectedly about any of that part of her past which she felt did not now belong to her. Was she then forgetting Ralph Bramlett? You who understand young true hearts smile over the question; they do not so easily forget. She made no attempt to deceive herself, but owned that she had loved Ralph Bramlett; but she remembered that he had of his own choice given her up and chosen another. It would not only be a weakness but a sin for her to dally now, and sentimentalize over the broken past. If she meant to be true to herself, to her mother, and above all to God, she must put away that which was not for her, and live for what God had given her. With the utmost of her strong young

will she was doing this. She believed that love, and marriage, and all that was involved in those two sacred words, had been taken out of her life, but she must not therefore waste it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ROBBIE.

IT is almost a pity that at this stage of her career Marjorie Edmonds could not have gone up and down the world as an apostle of common-sense. She fully realized that she had given her young true heart into the keeping of another, and that that other had been what she called "mistaken in himself," and deserted her. She had so managed the whole matter in her thoughts that in some way she had succeeded in exonerating him from all blame. People could not love to order, she told herself; if he had found that Estelle was the one for his life-friend, and she was not, no other course had been open to him save the one he had taken; except, perhaps, that had he understood her better he could have done it in a better way. But the point to be noted is, that she did not, because of this experience, conclude that she had a broken heart, and must henceforth make herself and all about her miserable. She did not even intend to be unhappy. There is a sense in which she would not allow herself to be; if the holy and blessed experiences of love and marriage were not for her, there was yet a beautiful, helpful life be-

fitting a daughter of the King, for her to live. She meant to live it. She assured herself that only sin could make people utterly miserable ; and then she instantly corrected even that view and said: "I mean only unforgiven sin." And in that, she had gotten above the sickly sentimentality which talks about "wasted affections" and "blighted hopes," as if there were nothing else in life but these, and that because of a bitter experience one must go about thereafter a ruined soul ; we have a right to be proud of her, and to hold her up as a model, not only for people of common-sense, but pre-eminently for people who call themselves Christians, to follow. Is it not time for us to remember that upon those who belong to the family of Jesus Christ, and are called to be joint heirs with Him, no real blight can fall ?

At the same time, it is not denied that the experience through which Marjorie had passed had left its mark. Among other ways in which it showed, was that one connected with social life. She ceased to be the center of a certain circle, as she had undoubtedly been for a year or two. She went very little into society and almost entirely avoided places at which her mother was not expected. Yet, after all, perhaps this last was not so different from what the world had been accustomed to in her. Mrs. Edmonds had often gone to gatherings for Marjorie's sake from which she would much rather have been excused, and both

Ralph and Marjorie had often, in the past, been grumbled at for declining invitations, with no better reason on the girl's part, than that she did not like to leave mother so much alone; Ralph reserving to himself the right to decline all invitations that he chose, without any excuse whatever.

It was the dull season of the year, however, in the society in which they had heretofore moved; the time when the real victims of society life were trying to rally from the dissipations of the winter, and get themselves refreshed in strength and wardrobe for the summer's campaign. There was therefore not so much necessity for breaking in upon their choice home-evenings. It perhaps cannot be denied that there was a disposition on Marjorie's part to avoid any place of entertainment where she had reason to suppose that Ralph and Estelle would be. She had considered the question with deliberation, and determined that it was not at present her duty to make the sacrifice which this would demand. Had her intimacy with Estelle, which she had planned, developed, and the relations of honest, earnest friendship which she intended, been evolved, she would have managed this matter of society differently. But as it was, it had not only become painful to her, but was evidently disagreeable to Estelle to have any sort of conversation with her; and in the few times which they had met, the interviews were so far from being either helpful or agreeable, that

Marjorie felt justified in deciding that the less they should see of each other for the present, the better it would be.

“Estelle dislikes me,” she told herself gravely, “quite as much as I was at one time in danger of disliking her. It is not dislike that I feel now, at least I do not think it is, but I do not enjoy her society, and so long as I do her no good, but rather harm, apparently, every time I meet her, why should we make martyrs of ourselves?”

So she planned a little; it required very little planning. Spring had brought complications in Ralph's business which held him to long hours and perplexing mental work. At the various church-gatherings in which Marjorie and her mother interested themselves to an unusual degree, neither Estelle nor Ralph appeared.

As a matter of fact, they had not found time to attend even one of those mid-week prayer-meetings, for which Ralph had magnanimously arranged, when he decided to unite with the church. So that at places where she had expected to meet them as a matter of course, Marjorie suffered no such embarrassment. In the early spring, the Gardners, with whom Estelle was becoming intimate, gave a large party, and invited Marjorie and her mother; but it chanced that Mrs. Edmonds was, at the time, suffering from a slight cold, and felt it unwise to expose herself to the evening air, so that the invitation, with this for an excuse, was promptly declined.

But if Marjorie's intimacy with Estelle had come to naught, her friendship with Glyde progressed rapidly. It was a sort of one-sided intercourse which they had; Marjorie went very rarely indeed to the Douglass home, but Glyde came constantly to see her. The young girl seemed instinctively to understand why this state of things should be, and made no complaint nor comment because her almost daily visits were not returned. There were always reasons for her coming; She was by no means an idler in the church. There was a discouraged mission-band which was dragging out a spiritless existence. Glyde heard of it almost by accident, so quiet did the young ladies keep even their organization.

She had invited herself to become a member, and had taken hold of the matter with an energy that foreshadowed success. The girls, astonished and at first almost appalled over the new life which had been infused into their midst, began to rouse themselves and take hold of some plans with energy; and Glyde was continually coming to Mrs. Edmonds and Marjorie for suggestions. Nor had she by any means either forgotten or relinquished her desire to work among the poor friendless little children who were without "aprons and pretty things." There could be nothing systematic in this direction while she was so young. Her mother, not always careful what her older daughters did, shielded this youngest one with a very tender care, and shrank back with horror from

the thought of her taking up any work which looked like district-visiting. Yet, little by little, without that name attached, or without formality of any kind, Glyde had almost a district on her roll.

There was a girl in Mrs. Watson's class who had a sick sister at home, lying day after day on a dreary little bed; and nothing bright or cheery ever came to her, so far as Glyde could learn, save what Mrs. Watson, who was poor, and crowded with home cares, could accomplish out of her busy life. Such joy and brightness as gathered around that little bed, after Glyde made its acquaintance, one might fill a volume in describing.

There was a boy of whom she heard by accident, living on an entirely safe and respectable street, where she felt sure her mother would be willing to have her visit. The boy was a cripple. He was helped into his chair in the morning and helped out of it at night, when his mother came home. All day long he lived his lonely little life; his only company being such picture-papers as his mother could occasionally pick up, through her friends in the mill. Glyde's fingers fairly trembled with joy when she wrote his name on her list; she knew of so many bright things that she could put into his life. Mrs. Edmonds accompanied her upon her first visit, to satisfy the girl's mother that no reasonable excuse could be offered for prohibiting her, and after that Glyde went twice a week with her packages of books, papers, writing materials, crayons, water-colors, and what not.

Such joy came with her into that poor little home where love had been struggling all alone, as the mother had believed was not possible for her boy until he found it through the gateway of the grave. Oh there were lovely things that Glyde could do, though she was still young and fair, and must be shielded from the coarse, and the low, and the brutal as much as possible. She had two or three girl-acquaintances now, of the kind which she had met in New York. Pale-faced, hard-working girls in cotton gloves, or very much mended kid ones, or quite often, no gloves at all. They held aloof from her for a time; even tossed their heads when she tried to bow, looked the other way when she wanted to speak to them. In short they passed through the various periods of insolence, superciliousness, cold reserve, and wondering, doubtful half-concessions, and finally became, not only her devoted admirers, but friends; girls who would have been willing to die for her, if need be. She told Marjorie a great deal about them; and that young woman and her mother added to their other duties and cares, plans for helping "Glyde's girls." All things considered it was by no means a dull or long spring to the little circle which understood one another and worked together.

The month of April had retired into the background, and May was bringing the breath of early flowers and the hint of summer in her sunshiny train, when, one afternoon, Glyde Douglass tripped

up the steps of the Edmonds' home and pulled the bell in a little more eager and impatient manner than usual. She was in such extreme haste to get inside with her bit of news that if the door had not been locked she would have waited for no ceremony. However, she had to wait; and there came presently a little frown of disappointment on her bright face; the bell was not answered; nobody was at home. How very provoking, when she had wanted to see them on such special and important business. Where could they all be so early in the afternoon? They must have gone for a long drive; it was too early for their usual walk. Well, there was nothing for it but to wait. She must call upon Robbie first, then; and keep from telling him the beautiful piece of news if she could. Though she felt very much as though she must tell somebody.

Still feeling in the hurry of excitement, though the special need for haste was over, she made all speed for the corner, signaled a passing car and rode out to the quiet dull part of the town, where the houses were poor, and small, and respectable. Leaving the car at the corner she walked down a street which was still narrower, and where there was still smaller and poorer respectability, stopping at last before a tiny cottage with one front window. This was her crippled boy's home. He was sitting by the window, and the air was so mild that it was open a little way. He clapped his small blue-veined hands at sight of his caller.

“Goody!” he said gleefully, “I was afraid you couldn’t come.”

He was nearly fourteen years old; but his four years of helplessness and frailness had made him look and appear much younger.

“I’ve been watching for you this hour; I’ve got something nice to tell you,” he added, as Glyde let herself in, and came to his side.

“So have I,” thought Glyde, “only I must not tell you, not yet; it would be even harder for you to wait, than it is for me.

“Have you?” she said aloud, placing a lovely white lilac in his hand as she spoke. “I like nice things. I wonder what it is? Can I guess? You have found another word in your puzzle; one that you and I couldn’t make out.”

“No;” he said, laughing gleefully. “It isn’t that.”

“Then you have made, with your paints, just the right shade for that queer flower which we were trying to copy; and that I was to ask Miss Edmonds about, the next time I saw her.”

“Oh, did you ask her?” said Robbie. “Because I haven’t found it, Miss Glyde; I’ve tried every every paint in my box, and it doesn’t make it.”

“Good!” she said. “Yes, I asked her; and I have the right box of paints in my bag this minute, with the one marked that will make exactly the shade we are after. So Miss Edmonds says, and she knows. They are lovely colors, Robbie, we can make ever so many pretty things with them

that we couldn't with your others. I suspect they cost a good deal more than the others did; Mr. Maxwell sent them to you."

"Oh goody, goody!" said Robbie, his small hands clasped in ecstasy, "I'm just as *glad!* Now I can finish coloring that card for mother's birthday, can't I? To think of my being able to make a present for mother! Isn't everybody good to me? But you haven't guessed my news, Miss Glyde."

She was bending over him pinning a spray of bloom to his buttonhole, and smiling at his eager, upturned face. What a lovely boy Robbie was! and how bright and glad he was over the little bits of brightness which she could put into his life. It seemed very strange to her that he should have been forgotten and neglected so long.

"No," she said, "I am afraid I cannot guess, after all. When I was a school-girl they used always to have to tell me the answers to conundrums, and things of that kind that others puzzled over. I like to puzzle other people, but I was never good at guessing things for myself. What is it, Robbie, tell me about it."

As she spoke, she drew the little rocker which Mr. Maxwell had sent for the mother to rest in when her long day's work was done, and placed it in just the position that Robbie liked, so he could look at her.

"Why," said Robbie, "I've got another friend; a splendid young man! he came to see me yester-

day and the day before, and he is coming again to-day."

Nothing more delightful than the boy's pure eager face and great brown eyes can be imagined as he told off this wonderful bit of news.

"Oh," said Glyde in gleeful sympathy, "what a splendid thing! I never could have guessed so grand a secret as that."

She thought at once of Mr. Maxwell; he had promised to come during some leisure hour and call upon Robbie, but up to this time having many protégés of his own and feeling that the boy was in good hands, he had not, so far as Glyde had known, redeemed the promise; although Robbie felt well acquainted with him, and had received flowers, and fruits, as well as books by his kindness, Glyde being the medium through which they were bestowed. Of course Robbie's new friend must be Mr. Maxwell. He must have chosen not to tell his name, since Robbie did not mention it. If this were the case of course she must not betray his secret, so she asked no questions in that line.

"Yes," said Robbie, "it is a great thing. The way he came to get acquainted with me, Miss Glyde, I was sitting here by the window, and mother said I might have it open just a little bit to get a smell of spring; she fixed it so I could push it down if the wind began to blow. That is, I mean she thought she did; but she wedged the block in a little bit too much, or got it a little too

far from me. All of a sudden the wind began to blow real hard, and I tried to shut the window; I worked and *worked*, and I couldn't seem to get strength enough in my hand to push that block out. And just as I said aloud: 'Oh dear me! I don't know what to do! mother won't like to have the wind blow on me;' that man came along, and don't you think he heard what I said! 'What's up, my boy?' he asked me, and then I told him about the window, and my not being able to move, you know, and all that; I told it real quick, because the wind was blowing, and before I got it quite told, he sprang up the steps and opened the door. 'Walk in,' he said, just as if I had told him to," and Robbie stopped to laugh. "And then he rushed over to this window and with one touch of his little finger he got the block out of the way and the window shut. Then he sat down in that chair, right where you are sitting, and said he, 'Now I guess we are acquainted, aren't we, young man? and can have a visit.' Wasn't he splendid? And we had oh, such a nice visit! He asked me if he could come again; and he said he had a pocket about him somewhere he guessed, that would hold something; the next time, he would see what he could do with it. And the next time he came, that was yesterday, he had an orange in one pocket, and a great big apple in another; and the loveliest card in a little pocket; here it is, Miss Glyde. See! it has a picture of Christ on it, healing people. If Christ

were walking along the streets to-day as He was then and I should call out to Him, He would stop and heal me, right away; wouldn't he, Miss Glyde?"

Glyde could scarcely keep the tears from her voice as she answered.

"He is in the world now, Robbie, just the same, you know; He would heal you now if it were the best thing for you; perhaps He will some day."

Robbie shook his head. "No, the doctors told mother that I couldn't ever be well. But then, maybe they didn't know this Doctor," a sudden light of interest shining in his eyes. "There wasn't any 'couldn't' to Him, was there, Miss Glyde?"

"Only the 'couldn't' which was made by its not being best for people;" said Glyde, with confidence. "He knows everything, remember; perhaps he knows that it is best for you not to be well, here. There might be a 'best' that we didn't understand at all."

"Yes," said Robbie gravely, "that's so; if I could walk, I might grow up and be a bad man. There is a woman works at the mill, near mother; she had a little boy once who was hurt just in the same way that I was; only it wasn't his back. He was sick a long time; and he got well. But now he drinks, and gets drunk, and knocks her when he comes home at night. Knocks his mother, Miss Glyde; just think of it! I'd rather have to sit here a hundred years and never take a step,

than to get to be such a man that I'd knock my mother. Miss Glyde," with a sudden eager change of voice, "there comes my new friend! I see him hurrying along on the other side of the street; he always walks fast; he has so many nice things to do for people that he has to save his time, I guess. Would you mind brushing my hair back just a little, so it would look nice, with the flower, you know?"

Glyde laughed, and brought the white-handled brush that Mrs. Edmonds had sent him, and brushed back the thick brown curls from the pale wide forehead, and readjusted the cushions at his back; just in time. There came a business-like knock at the door. "Come in," said Robbie's eager voice, and Glyde stood waiting with smiling eyes. What fun it would be to meet Mr. Maxwell there, and show off her boy about whom she had talked so much. Still, she could not help wondering where Mrs. Edmonds and Marjorie were, and why he did not bring them. She had felt so sure that they were out driving with him.

The door had opened promptly in response to Robbie's invitation and there had entered, not Mr. Maxwell, but a stranger.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“OLD ACQUAINTANCES.”

IN the act of making a respectful bow to the lady in attendance, the stranger stopped and stared ; then spoke quickly :

“I beg your pardon, but surely this is Miss Douglass?”

“Yes,” said Glyde, the pink on her cheeks flushing up into her hair, “I am Glyde Douglass ; and you—I remember you perfectly ; it is Mr. Burwell, is it not?”

“That is my name,” he said, in the tone of one who was very glad of it ; then he held out his hand.

“We may shake hands surely ; we are old acquaintances, are we not, Miss Douglass ? It is a great surprise as well as a great pleasure to meet you again. I have often wondered how—I mean, I was not aware that you lived in this part of the country. I thought you were from the West. My uncle said something about Denver.”

“Oh, that is where my Uncle Anthony lives, whose guest I was in New York ; but this is my home. Mr. Burwell, you have made the acquaintance of my friend Robbie, he says.”

Thus reminded, the astonished young man turned toward the waiting Robbie, and for the next fifteen minutes the boy had no occasion to be jealous of Miss Glyde as a rival. The pockets, of which there seemed to be many, were filled with treasures. Not eatables this time, except that there was one great juicy apple, but little thoughtful things chosen evidently with a view to relieving the weariness of the long hours which the prisoned boy must have to pass alone. Glyde, looking on, all in a flutter of pleasure for Robbie's sake, saw how tender had been the thought of this strong man for the frail boy. Then, too, she could not help noticing how wise and cheery and helpful were the words he spoke.

“Did you learn that verse, my boy?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” said Robbie, his great brown eyes seeming to grow larger and gentler. “I learned it right away, that afternoon, as soon as you had gone. It is a beautiful verse; Miss Glyde, I didn't tell it to you. I'll say it now. ‘As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.’ Isn't that nice, Miss Glyde? Just for me, you know. Mother is such a comfort to me! There couldn't anything tell it to a boy like me better than that.”

Glyde and Mr. Burwell exchanged glances of significant sympathy and tenderness for the boy; then Mr. Burwell said, “That's it, my boy; it is a beautiful verse for us fellows who have good mothers. It was the first one that made me ac-

quainted with the Lord Jesus, and the comfort He was willing to be to people. My mother, you see, had gone to heaven, and I missed her, oh, more than I can tell. It seemed to me sometimes, that I could not live without her. Then, one day I came upon this verse, and it astonished me so much! I had not thought that anybody could comfort a boy like his mother; and to find that there was a great powerful One who could do anything, that was right, who had actually planned to be such a comfort to me as my mother was, and promised it! Why, I can't tell you what a splendid discovery it was!"

"Yes," said Robbie, "I can think it out. But you needed it awfully, didn't you? It doesn't seem to me as though I could live without my mother."

There was more talk, some of it gay and frolicsome; some of it sweet and strong; all of it cheery. In the midst of it, Glyde looked at her watch and made a reluctant admission: "Robbie I am ever so sorry, but I shall have to go now; I promised my father to do an errand for him down town at five o'clock; and I shall just have time to get there."

Mr. Burwell arose at once. "Then we must both go, Robbie; I have to be in a gentleman's office away down on Burke Street at five; I had just this hour for you between times, this afternoon. Miss Douglass, may I walk with you to your car, or whatever route you take?"

When they were on the street together, she told him what she knew about Robbie and his unfortunate accident, and the sad outlook for his future ; and also of how glad she was that he had found him, and put such brightness into a few hours of his life. He listened to the story with such hearty sympathy and had ready so many suggestions calculated to add to the boy's comfort, that Glyde felt sure here was one who could enjoy her precious secret ; she unfolded it at once. Uncle Anthony, that same dear Uncle who had taken her to New York. Did he remember him ? She had been writing long letters to him this winter, about all her affairs, but especially had she had a good deal to tell him about Robbie. Among other things she had told him that she was thinking and praying about a great wheeled chair for the boy, such as he could himself roll along the streets. She had sent for circulars, and inquired as to kinds, and prices. She did not know whether she could ever raise money enough ; she was not acquainted with many people who seemed to have money to give ; but she was going to try. She had asked God to help her think of the right ones to call upon.

“I never thought of such a thing as asking Uncle Anthony to help,” Glyde explained, “because he is not at all wealthy, and of course there are people where he lives who need to be thought about ; my plan was to raise the money if I could, in our own church. And don't you think he an-

swered the letter on the very evening of the day in which he had received it! And he said, in his own quaint way, which is unlike any other person's that he supposed by this time the One of whom I asked direction had reminded me that I ought to use my common sense, as well as my prayers; and my common sense ought to have told me that he had a special corner of his heart set apart for the ‘Robbies’ of the world; didn't I remember that Aunt Estelle's little brother who died, was named Robbie? Aunt Estelle is my uncle's young wife; he had her with him only a month, after their marriage, but he has loved her memory all his life; and what do you think he put in his letter? A check which will cover the entire cost of the chair! The letter only came today; and I've been in such a bubble of delight over it! I just longed to tell somebody. I went to call upon a friend to explain it all to her, I wanted to ask a friend of hers to manage the correspondence about it, for me, but she wasn't at home; and you are the first one I have been able to tell. I had to keep quiet before Robbie, of course: I thought it would be too much strain upon him to be expecting the chair for weeks, perhaps; those things are delayed so often. So he doesn't know anything about it.”

Mr. Burwell was exactly the person for a confidence of this sort; he entered into the scheme with the deepest interest, not only, but with refreshing energy. He knew the spot of all others

in New York where the best possible style of wheeled carriage could be bought for the lowest possible price. He was on a hurried business trip, looking up some details of a law case, for his chiefs; he would be back in New York in three days' time, and nothing would give him greater pleasure than to serve her. His uncle knew one member of the firm who had to do with these carriages, and could very possibly secure a reduction from the regular price. If Miss Douglass would be at leisure that evening and would allow him, he would call upon her and they could then arrange the entire matter.

One would have supposed that it might have troubled an honest young man to define what matters there were which needed any arrangement! There seemed nothing left to be done but to transfer Glyde's check to him; but the young lady accepted his proposition with gratitude; it did not even occur to the innocent creature that they had no known business which could occupy the evening. But there is such a thing as manufacturing business; that which these two evolved, lasted for that entire evening, and the next. Moreover, on the afternoon of the second day they both made a somewhat extended call upon Robbie. On the third day, Mr. Burwell went back to New York to purchase the wonderful chair. But he left interests of infinite importance to himself, behind him. He had secured from Glyde, permission to write to her, not only concerning the chair.

but about the meetings at the Mission, where he was now a regular worker. Also he was to tell her of his New York boys, who, though not in the least like Robbie, were yet in sore need of help; such help as she could give them if she would.

“ And girls, too, Miss Douglass,” he said earnestly. “ Why I know some poor girls in our Mission who would feel that they had been introduced to the society of angels, if they could have such an one as you for a friend.” He said nothing about a young man who might possibly have like views! and Glyde was far too much in earnest to even think of such an interpretation of his words. She assured him that she would be only too glad to help his boys, or his girls in any way that he thought she could; and added that it was the work to which she wanted to give her life; especially to help the class of girls of which he had just spoken.

* * * * *

Robbie had taken many rides in his wonderful wheeled chair, and more letters had passed between Glyde and Mr. Burwell than Mrs. Douglass seemed to consider necessary, when there occurred an event in the social world which placed all party lovers on the *qui vive* of expectation.

It will be remembered that the Schuyler farmhouse was large and roomy, and most hospitably inclined. Also that there were gay young people there who knew how to entertain their friends and kept open house at all seasons of the year. But

perhaps once a year, it might be in midwinter, or at the opening of summer, they varied as to seasons, the family were in the habit of throwing open every room in their delightful old house, and thronging the place with their friends. Not an ordinary party but a joyous, old-fashioned time. They had chosen for this year's festival the month of May. Mrs. Edmonds and Marjorie had received invitations and were considering them, among other matters of importance. One of these was connected with their lodger. In June, Mr. Maxwell's long holiday would be over. He was going abroad for the summer months, on business connected with his college, and in the following October his work as a professor would commence again in earnest. The question was, should they try to let the room which he would so soon vacate? There was no special need for this, so far as the pecuniary side was concerned. Mrs. Edmonds, though by no means a wealthy woman, had enough, prudently managed, for herself and Marjorie to live comfortably upon. The room had been rented in the first place because they often felt lonely, especially on winter nights, and liked the thought of there being some one in the house to whom they could appeal if occasion offered. Now, however, they found that they shrank from having a stranger come into their home.

"It would be a very different matter if we could keep Mr. Maxwell," said the mother thoughtfully, "we know him." She seemed to forget that she

had taken him as an utter stranger. "What do you think, Marjorie dear; shall we go back to our old ways and get along alone, or shall we let our friends know that we have a vacant room?"

"I don't know," said Marjorie a little wearily. "It is difficult to imagine just us two alone; we have had a lodger so long; at least it seems a very long time since Mr. Maxwell came."

"Yes," said Mrs. Edmonds. "We shall miss him very much.

She was looking closely at her daughter with the keen vision of an anxious mother; but the girl answered in a quiet, unresponsive tone, "Yes, of course we shall; but then I suppose we could take another stranger and get acquainted with him and plan to miss him."

She laughed a little drearily. For the moment, life looked to her like a long stretch of meeting and missing people. Suddenly, she turned and looked steadily at her mother with a new thought in her heart, and shadowing her face. They were like girls together, people said, she and her mother, but of course they were not "girls together," and the mother's hair was turning gray. She was a frail, pale mother; what if she should go away some day and leave Marjorie alone! The girl's heart seemed fairly to cease beating for a single moment, then start afresh in unnatural thuds. She was like Robbie; it seemed to her that she could not live without her mother.

"Make it the way which seems easiest for you,

mother," she said earnestly. "I do not care which it is; truly I don't; so that you are comfortable. If you feel lonely at the thought of our being the only ones in the house at night, take another lodger by all means. He may prove to be a second Mr. Maxwell."

"I suppose, dear, you would not feel like closing the house and going away anywhere else for the winter?" asked Mrs. Edmonds hesitatingly. For the moment Marjorie forgot her desire that the mother should have exactly her way.

"Oh, no!" she said, hurriedly, "nor for the summer either, if we can help it. Do let us stay at home; I would rather be here than anywhere. There is my class to be thought of, and Glyde's girls, and our women who depend so much upon us. Besides, this is our home, mother, yours and mine. If we went away for a time, we should only have to come back; and that would make us feel more lonely than ever. We ought to stay here, oughtn't we? We shall never have any other home; you and I."

She had evidently given up all idea of any change of relations; and had no dreams of a possible rich future such as most happy, free-hearted girls indulge occasionally. It hurt her mother to think that this one lamb of hers was growing old and dignified before her time. Hurt her so much, that sometimes she could not keep the bitterness out of her heart when she thought of Ralph Bramlett. Why should such as he be permitted to

shadow the life of a girl like her Marjorie? Why did not Marjorie see his worthlessness?

If she could but by some means be made to see him with her mother's eyes!

Into the midst of this family council came Mr. Maxwell with a note of invitation in his hand.

"The Schuylers have kindly remembered me, also," he said. "I have been too much engaged during the winter for enjoyments of this kind; but I have met Mr. Schuyler, and was pleasantly impressed by him. If I knew any intimate friends of mine who were going to spend an evening at his house soon, so as to ensure a pleasant time for myself, I think I might be induced to accept this invitation."

Mrs. Edmonds met this with an appreciative laugh. "I shall be glad to secure you for an ally," she said. "I have been trying to persuade Marjorie to go. The Schuylers are very old friends of ours, and it does not seem quite the courteous thing to decline an invitation of this character, with no better excuse than we have. Marjorie is disposed to think that it will be too hard an evening for me—to go so far, and to be out, of necessity, quite late; but I have assured her that I am entirely equal to an occasional dissipation of that sort. If you can induce her to think well of it, I shall be glad."

She would be more glad than she cared to express to Mr. Maxwell. Being watchful and anxious, she could not help knowing that, while her

daughter's face was uniformly sweet and quiet, and her interest in the new duties and cares which she had taken upon herself sincere and pronounced, yet she was by no means her old bright self. This matter of steadily declining all invitations of a general character, disturbed the mother. She understood the subtle reason for it, and knew there was danger that Marjorie might grow morbidly sensitive in this direction as the years passed, unless something occurred to change the current of her feelings. She wondered if Mr. Maxwell had a suspicion of her anxiety, and was breaking through his usual habits for a purpose. He had a curious way of seeming to know how people felt and thought, without explanations of any sort. It would not be the first time, she reflected, that he had come quietly to her aid, unsuspected by Marjorie.

It was finally determined that the invitation should be accepted, and that the three should go in company; Marjorie having steadily and with a determined air negatived any suggestions looking to the release of her mother.

"I do not care to go, mother," she said quietly, "and do not feel, as you seem to, that courtesy demands our presence; but since you feel so, I am willing to go *with you*; not without you."

Nevertheless, it came to pass that such was not to be the arrangement. On the afternoon of the gathering, a near neighbor of theirs who was ill, sent to know if Mrs. Edmonds would be willing

to spend the evening with her, in her husband's enforced absence; and as she had been quite ill and was nervous, and had evidently set her heart upon having Mrs. Edmonds, and no one else, for company, that lady did not consider it right to offer a mere social engagement as an excuse for disappointing her.

"It is not as though I really belonged to that part of the world," she said, smiling, to Marjorie. "You know, my dear, that it is only your fondness for having me with you that makes it important; I shall not be missed, nor thought about twice this evening, except by your dear self; and as Mrs. Stuart really seems to cling to me, I feel that I ought to stay. Don't you think so, dear?"

"You have left nothing else for me to think," said Marjorie, trying to smile. She shrank to a degree that she did not herself understand, from going to the Schuylers' without her mother. Yet, as the idea seemed only absurd, she felt compelled to do as she would not, and in due course of time found herself journeying in Mr. Maxwell's company over the road which was so familiar to her, but which she had not traversed since that memorable November evening. If Mr. Maxwell remembered the same evening, which was probable, he made no sign, but kept his companion's thoughts on the book which they had last read; questioning and cross-questioning, as to her knowledge of it, so skillfully that Marjorie was compelled to put aside memories and nervousness altogether, and

give undivided attention to the subject in hand, if she would not disgrace her reputation as a listener.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FATEFUL EVENING.

THEY were late in arriving at the Schuyler farm, having been detained at the last moment by some tardily thought of plans for Mrs. Edmonds' comfort during their absence ; nearly all the other guests seemed to have been present for some time, and were in full tide of sociability.

Prominent among them, quite a center, indeed, was Estelle Douglass, in new and exceedingly becoming spring attire ; and with a glow on her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes which indicated entire satisfaction with herself and her surroundings.

She hovered not far away from Ralph Bramlett during the most of evening, seeming to desire especially to make known the fact that she had a right to appropriate him.

That young man was by no means at his best. He was more carefully dressed, perhaps, than he used to be ; although he had always been careful of his personal appearance, but his fifteen hundred dollar salary had enabled him to indulge in some expenditures in that direction from which economy had held him heretofore. His new suit was undoubtedly becoming ; but his face was pale and

unnaturally grave ; his eyes had a look of unrest, and his manner to Estelle, had any one been closely observing them, would at times have suggested almost irritability.

Marjorie would not be a close observer ; feeling sure that no good could result, at least at present, from their coming in contact with each other, she took pains to keep as far away from both Estelle and Ralph as she could, without attracting attention. If she had been thinking very much about herself, however, she would have discovered that so far from Ralph seconding her efforts in this direction, he was evidently anxious to be in her vicinity. If she found her way to the music-room, he was sure to be there in a very few minutes ; did she join the promenaders in the large, old-fashioned hall, the second turn she made, Ralph was almost certain to be just behind her. When she sang, as she had promised her mother she would do, when invited, it was Ralph Bramlett who stood at her right, so close to Mr. Maxwell that it was with difficulty he turned her music. He said almost nothing, apparently to anybody, and his face grew constantly moodier. Once, Mr. Maxwell turned and looked at him for an instant, in utmost surprise ; the occasion was when Estelle had asked him to join the groups on the piazza.

“ I don't wish to go on the piazza,” he said. “ Can you never feel willing to let a person do what he wants to for five seconds at a time ? ”

The question and tone were so charged with

irritability, that it had been impossible for Mr. Maxwell not to turn to be sure of the speaker, nor had he kept the look of reproof entirely out of his eyes. Ralph saw him, and colored, and felt more annoyed and angry than before.

But it was late in the evening when the incident occurred which brought to nought all Marjorie's efforts to avoid a direct conversation with her old friend. She was out, with many others, on the lawn, which was brilliantly and fantastically lighted with many Chinese lanterns. It formed a place of special attraction on this lovely May evening, which was almost as warm as an evening in midsummer. Marjorie and little Effie Schuyler had been taking a walk through the grounds, with Mr. Maxwell for their companion. There was a certain remarkable tree on the farther side of the house, which Effie had been describing to Mr. Maxwell; he had asked her many questions concerning it, which she could not answer, and she had become very anxious to take him to see it. She had finally carried him off in triumph to see for himself how impossible it was for her to tell all the things about it that he had asked. Marjorie had taken a rustic seat under one of those charmingly lighted trees, and agreed to await their return. She had seen that wonderful tree many times, she affirmed, and knew no more about it than Effie did; if Mr. Maxwell could answer his own questions, simply by observing it once, he was the very person to give it attention.

It was under the trees that Ralph Bramlett found her. He came upon her suddenly, from one of the paths that was in shadow, and it chanced that at the moment none of the many groups on the lawn were near her. The first that she knew of Ralph's approach was the sound of her name, "Marjorie!" spoken by the voice she knew so well, but there was a new note in it—a note of peremptoriness, irritability, almost of anger. No wonder that it startled her. She half arose, then sat down again.

"Yes——" she said gently. Her thought had always been to be as kind and cordial with Ralph as possible, when it should suit his pleasure to allow her an opportunity. He gave her no time to consider what more she should say, but plunged at once into words.

"I want to see you; I have been watching for an opportunity all the evening, and you have been watching to avoid me. How long is this farce to go on? Why do you treat me in this absurd way? Look back over the months and see if you can answer the question. It is inconceivable that you are utterly heartless, and I had never thought of you as a flirt; but how else am I to construe your treatment of me?"

"Ralph!" she exclaimed, surprise and utter bewilderment in her voice. Was this the raving of a man who did not know what he was saying? It was so utterly unlike words which she had expected to hear from him! "What has occurred to



RALPH AND MARJORIE.

“The first she knew of Ralph’s approach was the sound of her name.”

excite you ; to make it possible for you to feel that you can address such language to me ? ”

“ Oh don't go on in that sort of way to me, Marjorie ; I tell you, I won't stand it ! I have borne a great deal from you ; but when you put on that air of soft surprise, and pretend that you do not understand, it is more than flesh and blood can endure. I ask you how long you wish this farce that has been going on for months between us, to be continued ? It is utter folly for you to pretend ignorance of my meaning ; you and I have known for years that we belong to each other, and that no person had a right to come between us. Explain, if you can, why you considered it necessary to suddenly build up a wall of separation between us, merely because my judgment in one single particular did not agree with yours, and I reserved the right, which any man of sense has, to use his own judgment, when he is the responsible person. It is six months since we were here, Marjorie ; are not six months of misunderstanding and misery enough to atone to even you, for not having had your own way in every particular ? ”

The uppermost feeling in Marjorie's mind for the moment, was bewilderment. Was this man growing insane, or was she ? “ Six months of misunderstanding and misery ; ” yes, she understood so much ! but the man to whom she had written a note so kind that even her mother feared lest it should be misunderstood, had returned her a reply which was almost insulting in

its coldness, and had from that time discarded even her friendship; not only this, but he was engaged to another; and yet he stood before her apparently upbraiding her for what had from the beginning been of his own planning! Certainly he must, for the moment, be out of his mind. How was she to reply? She looked at him out of great, troubled eyes, and allowed the startling query to pass through her mind: Could it be possible that he had been taking something stronger than the lemonades and chocolates which the Schuylers served? She dismissed the thought on the instant, as unworthy of consideration, and answered him as she might have done a semi-lunatic.

“Ralph, I have not the slightest conception of your meaning. You wrong me if you suppose that I have a hard thought in my heart concerning you. I have never at any time had the slightest desire to make one hour of your life miserable; on the contrary, my daily prayer is for your happiness in the life that you have chosen.”

He turned half away from her, as if in ungovernable impatience, even anger, as he said roughly: “Leave all that out; if you have nothing but prayers to offer me, I can get along without them. What I want to know, is, do you dare to tell me that you did not understand that we were the same as engaged to each other?”

The flush which had spread over Marjorie’s face at the sound of her name from his lips, had died

quite away; she was very pale now, but quiet enough; much less excited than was he.

“Ralph!” she said again; but there had come a change in her voice; there was an undertone of sternness—“I do not understand what possible good can result from speaking of those past days, now; whatever either of us may have thought in the past, has nothing to do with the present. The basis upon which we may talk in the future is one, I hope, of friendliness and kindness. But I, at least, remember that I am speaking to a man who is engaged to Estelle Douglass.”

“Estelle Douglass be hanged!” he said hoarsely. “Don’t fling her name at me now; you know perfectly well that you have yourself to thank for the wretched position in which I find myself. Had you not chosen to try to humiliate me, by flirting openly and shame-facedly with that insufferable psalm-singing hypocrite whom you have let into your house, I should never have been overwhelmed with the embarrassments which now beset me; it will hardly do for you to fling my misery in my face, when you have yourself to thank for it.”

Then indeed she arose, and the flash in her eyes was one of unmistakable indignation.

“Mr. Bramlett,” she said in a tone such as he had never before heard from her, “you forget yourself utterly. You are disgracing yourself and insulting me. I am quite unable to understand what your object can be. I will try hard to think that some unexpected trouble has tempora-

rily unsettled your mind ; I know of no other explanation which could atone for what you have said to me. Let me pass, please."

Then this young man of impulse felt himself suddenly impelled to an entire change of base. He caught at her arm as she would have passed him, and grasped her hand. "Marjorie, don't!" he said brokenly: "Don't go away; I don't know what I have said; I don't mean the half of it; I don't mean *any* of it, if you choose; only—I *can't* lose you again. Oh, Marjorie! how could you let anything or any person come between us? Nothing shall!"—bursting into sudden anger again,—“I will have my rights! You belong to me. Estelle Douglass is less than nothing to me, and always was. I was insane, or a fool, when I allowed her to imagine otherwise; it is not for you to lay such a thing up against me; you know, and always have known, that you are the only person in the world to me. Let us end all this at once, Marjorie. Let us be married, right away. I am in a position now to take care of you. Had I been, six months ago, all this misery might have been saved us. Marjorie, there is nothing, there shall be nothing, that can separate us again. Do not think about Estelle; she is a creature without depth; you have said so yourself, many a time; and we both know it is true. She will forget me in a week; she has known for a dozen years that you and I belonged to each other. Oh, Marjorie!—”

“Mr. Bramlett, I desire you to let me pass, without another instant’s delay! If you undertake to detain me, I shall call for assistance.”

And then Ralph Bramlett knew that he had passed beyond the bound of even his influence. Marjorie spoke in such a voice as he had not supposed she could use. He dropped his detaining hand suddenly, and took a single step aside. None too soon; she swept past him like a queen, just as Mr. Maxwell’s voice was heard, still in merry chat with little Effie Schuyler. There was the slightest possible touch of surprise in his manner as he saw who was waiting near Marjorie, but he lifted his hat to him courteously, not apparently noticing that he received no sort of response, and turned to Marjorie.

“Would you like to return to the house, Miss Edmonds, or shall we remain out longer?”

“I would like to go in at once,” said Marjorie, and he, too, noted the new ring in her voice. As Effie suddenly flitted away from them among the trees, she added: “Mr. Maxwell, I would like to go home, if it is possible. Do you think I could get away without attracting too much notice?”

“Certainly,” he said quietly. “It is quite time that an affair of this kind was breaking up. I had designed consulting your wishes as soon as I had bestowed Miss Effie in a safe place. I am beginning to have qualms of conscience over my promises to your mother, already.”

“Then let us get away at once,” said Marjorie

with unnecessary energy. "I will be ready in a very few minutes. I will not return to the parlors at all; Mrs. Schuyler is in the dining-room, I think, if you will come that way, we can go out by the dining-room door."

It was only too apparent that something had occurred to excite her painfully. The hand which Mr. Maxwell took to assist her up the steps, trembled, and was as cold as ice. But of course there was nothing which he could do, except to appear as blind as a bat, and conduct himself as though nothing unusual had occurred. This he did to perfection; mentally berating himself the while, for having left his charge; and, yet, in great mystification as to what could have occurred to so unnerve her.

In a very short space of time they were on the road, and the late moon was making their way brilliant. Even the moon came to suggest the evening when they had traveled this way before! Selim was at his very best, so their progress was rapid. Mr. Maxwell, taking no notice of his companion's few words, spoken with evident effort, talked on, almost uninterruptedly. Discovering it to be difficult for her to respond, even in monosyllables to his remarks, he took refuge in a long story of not too thrilling interest, which he knew, by being told in minutest detail could be expected to occupy a good deal of the time; he told it in a way to require no questionings, or comments. Some of it Marjorie heard; but the narrator did his work

so well, that during a portion of the time she could give herself up to the business of trying to get the control of her over-wrought nerves. It was a difficult thing to accomplish. She felt a sense of great relief in the discovery at last that in a very few minutes she would be at home and she could take refuge in the darkness of her own room. Meantime, what must her companion think of her? Being frank by nature, she resolved upon an attempt at explanation and apology.

“Mr. Maxwell, you have been very kind to me to-night, I want you to know that I am grateful. I had a conversation with—” she hesitated for the right word, and began again. “Something occurred this evening which has made me feel—incapable of conversation. You have seen it, of course, and have been thoughtful as usual. I thank you very much.”

He hardly knew how to reply to her, without exhibiting too much sympathy; but after a moment's hesitation, he said:

“Consider me at all times, please, as a friend with whom you may talk or keep silence, according to the mood of the hour. I am very well aware that we do not at all times feel like talking. Your mother has reached home before us and is at the window, I see. I am glad we have made such good time. She cannot have been long alone.”

Marjorie had fled to the solitude of her own room with a feeling of haste upon her, more than once during those six months; but never it seemed

to her more eagerly than she did that night. A strange sense of humiliation possessed her which made her shrink even from her mother's tender questionings. It was almost as though she had sat still and allowed herself and her mother's teachings, and the conscience and purity of them both to be insulted. What had not that man said to her under cover of their dead past! Not content with tearing away all the sacred privacy which should gather about his relations with the woman whom he had asked to be his wife, he must even propose *marriage to her!* The man whom she had trained herself for weeks to look upon in the same light as one who had already taken marriage vows!

What had his engagement meant to him, then? What had their friendship been worth, ever, since he could even accuse her, the woman he was at that moment professing to love above all others, of the lowest and coarsest form of petty revenge known to womankind! Her cheeks burned in the darkness as she thought of it. Oh, the man must certainly be insane! She could almost hope, for the honor of his future, that he was; yet her stern common sense coming to the rescue, assured her that he had known only too well what he was saying. He had been angry and determined; and had spoken out in the suddenness of his anger thoughts which must often have been in his mind. He did not love Estelle Douglass; did not even respect her enough not to speak such words of her as he had that night. And he had asked her to

be his wife! and she was daily planning for the time when they two should be as one! What a monstrous thing it was! She felt a great pity for Estelle, surging into her heart; and there met it that overwhelming sense of shame for herself. That he should take her to be such an one as that! That he should dare to talk to *her* about love! The pain and shame and burning indignation which she had kept under with resolute hand during that homeward ride, revenged themselves upon her at last in an outburst of more bitter tears than she had known she could shed.

Nevertheless she opened that communicating door before her mother was ready for rest, and went swiftly towards her, speaking rapidly:

“Mother, let us close the house just as soon as we can, and go away; let us be gone all summer; longer than that; forever, if it were possible. I cannot stay here.”

Mrs. Edmonds turned and looked at her daughter in wonder and dismay. What had happened now? The girl’s eyes were bright with the excitement which is not far removed from anger; yet she had been crying hard. Could Mr. Maxwell have said or done anything to disturb the careful self-control which she knew that Marjorie had been cultivating?

“My dear, what is it?” she asked, putting both arms around her child and drawing her to the old childhood resting-place, her face hidden on her mother’s breast. The act brought the tears again

for a few minutes, but she gave them little chance, this time. "Mother," she said, raising her head, "forgive me and do not be frightened. I ought not to disturb and distress you; so late as it is, too. Nothing very terrible has happened; that is—only—mamma, I feel as if I must go away from here now; as though I could not breathe in the same town with *them*."

She hid her face again, and the mother stood distressed and wondering. But presently the girl stood erect and finished her story, as much of it as she meant to tell.

"Mother, I have lost my respect for him now; and when a girl has to say that, it is bitter."

Then Mrs. Edmonds knew that her daughter had had an experience which she believed that loyalty to others would not allow her to tell, even to her mother.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"EVERYTHING HAS HAPPENED!"

WHAT spell came over Ralph Bramlett to cause him to make so strange a blot as this upon his life, do you ask? Oh, who shall undertake to account for the doings of that young man! Yet, after all, it is in keeping with his general character. What was he but a creature at the mercy of every passing impulse? A creature of fate, as he persistently phrased it, never being able to understand that he made his own fate; was constantly making it out of materials which would have lent themselves as well to quite another style of manufacture. He had by no means gone to the Schuyler farm with the intention of rushing like a madman into temptation. It will be remembered, perhaps, that it was not his nature to act upon long-planned intentions.

Once there, he had given himself up to the intoxication of Marjorie's presence. He had followed her from room to room, feasting his eyes upon her face, listening to the sound of her voice; getting, so far as was possible, every word that she uttered; using every means in his power to bring the spell of her old influence to bear upon him to its ut-

most, until he was wrought up to such a pitch of excitement, that for the time being he completely lost control of himself. Of course, he was one who, never having trained himself to self-control, found this an easy matter. The longer he looked at Marjorie and the more he listened to her words, the more hateful seemed the fate which he believed without any volition on his part had woven her meshes around him. He could not help speaking irritably to Estelle Douglass, almost savagely indeed, more than once, when there were not listeners; sometimes, as has been seen, when there were. In a certain sense she represented that baleful Fate which had ruined his life. Why had she been always at hand when for any reason he was especially annoyed about Marjorie?

Nay, he realized, and for one of his temperament it was an infinite pity that there was a degree of truth in it, that she had done what she could to prejudice him against his friend, and to make him feel that she had changed in her feelings toward him.

It will perhaps have to be confessed, that, creature of impulse though he was, and acting upon it all the while, there had been, through all the later months of his life, an undertone feeling that the present condition of things was not to last. This was not real life; it was simply a play in which the emotions were engaged, and he was a principal character. He was engaged to be married to Estelle Douglass; he had quarreled with Marjorie;

but somehow, before it should be forever too late, some one or some *thing* would interpose and set all these crooked relations right again. Fate could not be so cruel as to take Marjorie away from him entirely. Of course she belonged to him ; why, they had known it from their childhood ; everybody knew it ; none better than Estelle Douglass. All this was not deliberate conviction ; it was undertone, background. It was not allowed to influence his daily acts. He talked with Mr. Douglass, and with Estelle, and with any person, indeed, who had a right to know of his affairs, quite as though his future was mapped out plainly before him. Yet the subtle background of hope, yes, even of expectation, was there all the time. When he sought Marjorie that evening on the lawn and poured out his incoherent statements, and preferred his half-insane charges, he was not acting in accordance with any preconceived plans, but simply following the impulse of the moment. Had he planned, he knew her well enough to be sure that he was using exactly the wrong words to influence her in the way that he desired. Indeed, almost as fast as the words were out of his mouth, he regretted their utterance ; and as he saw Marjorie walking away with Mr. Maxwell, he called himself an insane fool.

He was positively savage with Estelle Douglass on the journey home.

“Do you remember the last time we were on this road together ?” she asked him ; for, either

by accident or design, those two had not been together on that road since the dreary ride had been taken in the early morning through the November rain.

Of course he did, he told her sharply; he had good reason to remember it; he had been a fool then, about some matters, and had continued one ever since.

This was suggestive, but ambiguous; Estelle did not know whether to meet it with indignation, or to pass it by as unworthy of notice. A remembrance of Ralph's present mood decided her on the latter course; it would hardly do to be indignant with a man whose own indignation had placed him beyond self-control.

"What is the matter, Ralph?" she asked, and she tried to speak soothingly. "Something has happened; you do not act like yourself. Are there any business matters disturbing you? Tell me about them, please, and let me help you bear them. You know we ought to help each other in every way now."

It was an unfortunate reminder.

"Everything has happened," he said, and he spoke even more roughly than before. "You cannot help me. You can only—" He stopped just in time, having almost said in his folly and passion, "You can only hinder me." He changed it to: "What do you suppose you could do? There is no use in telling you anything about it. It is my confounded fate. Nothing that I wanted very

much ever turned out as it ought to. I must have been born under an unlucky star.”

She decided then, poor girl, that it was affairs connected with his present business which had so disturbed him. There were days when he chafed bitterly under control; resenting the right of all the Snyders to “order him about as if he were a puppet,” he told her. Some of his old dreams and ambitions connected with the law had probably come back to him this day; some incident might have occurred to recall the hopes and dreams which he used to have of the future, and which she knew he had put aside, having decided to make his relations with Snyder, Snyder & Co. as permanent as possible. Yet she could well understand that other plans, which had been central with him for so long, must sometimes push themselves forward in a mocking way, to make him miserable. Was it fortunate or unfortunate, that, coming as near to the truth as she did, she nevertheless missed it? The old hopes and dreams had undoubtedly been recalled in vividness that night, but they had not to do with the law. Estelle had missed her attendant when he and Marjorie were on the lawn together, but she had also missed Mr. Maxwell, and believed him to be taking a promenade with Marjorie. Nothing had occurred to make her associate Ralph’s wretched humor in any way with Marjorie. So, woman-like, she did what she could to comfort him. She could not know—how should she?—that her

very voice was irritating to him that night. She had too great faith in him, and in the words which he had spoken to her, to believe for a moment any such thing.

Yet, despite all this, it must not be understood that Ralph Bramlett was a hopeless hypocrite. There were times when Estelle Douglass was able to comfort him. At these times he assured himself that she was more fitted to his needs than Marjorie ever could have been. There were days together when he succeeded in convincing himself that everything was as it should be, and that he and Estelle would get along nicely together. Of course on such days, he expected to carry out all the pledges he had made to her, and planned accordingly. Yet there was, all the time, that haunting little undertone of which he was conscious, whispering that perhaps, some way, it would all turn out differently, even yet. Undoubtedly this is a contradiction. It must have been observed by students of human nature, that these seeming, and indeed actual contradictions, are marked features of certain temperaments. Ralph Bramlett was fully determined to have his own way, and carry out his own plans without interference from any source, human or divine; at the same time he was absolutely certain that he was not in the least to blame for the present condition of things, that he could not have ordered his life differently had he made ever so much effort, and that it was in short that mysterious imp which he had chosen to

name Fate who was responsible for all that concerned him.

He left Estelle at her own door, with the coldest good-night she had received from him since he had told her she was the one chosen by him from all others, and went home angry with her, and with all the world. He lay awake half the night, going over and over again the scenes which distressed and angered him, and bemoaning his miserable fate. Yet, before morning, his mood had changed. He called himself a consummate fool for his part of the proceedings, at the very moment when he took care to assure himself that had it not been for such and such circumstances beyond his control he never would have done as he did. By daylight he said of Marjorie:

"Well, let her go; she cares for no one but that fellow; nothing is more evident; she even talks like him. It is just as well as it is. If he hadn't goaded me on by his insufferable assumption I should never have thought of making the spectacle of myself which I did before her. Something for them to laugh over, I suppose, when it is described to him!" and he ground his teeth in impotent rage at the idea.

"If I had maintained my dignity, and had nothing whatever to say to her, it would have been a great deal better. I believe I will write her a line of explanation. I can call it an apology, by way of courtesy, and tell her that I was disturbed

yesterday about business matters, and ask her to excuse the ravings of a man who did not know what he was saying. No, I won't; I won't do anything of the kind. I will just let things take their own course. Something may come of it, after all, different from what I imagine. She may really not have supposed that I continued to care for her. Perhaps I shall even hear from *her* during the day; or the week; who knows?"

It will be observed that no less than three times in the course of this short interview with himself, he had entirely changed his view of the question; and that he understood Marjorie Edmonds as little as she had him. What may *not* be expected, or feared, of a man who is so reckless of his opinions upon all subjects that they can actually be swayed by the passing idle thoughts of the moment?

It will be readily imagined that Mrs. Edmonds lost no time in acting upon Marjorie's sudden decision. She believed that it would be an excellent thing for her daughter to get away from home and its surroundings, for a time, at least. She only very dimly imagined what might have occurred to rouse Marjorie in this way, but whatever it was, while feeling the deepest sympathy for her daughter, her prayer that night was one of thanksgiving. Surely it was better for Marjorie to know and realize the truth. And if it had been proved to her that Ralph Bramlett was unworthy of even her friendship, the mother knew

her daughter well enough to understand that she was saved.

Before evening of the following day, sundry plans for the summer had been discussed, not only between themselves, but with Mr. Maxwell. That gentleman urged them strongly to select his own college-town as their summer resort; advocating its climate and surroundings with great confidence.

“To be sure, I am not to be there myself,” he said, “which I assure you I regret; it would give me great pleasure to show you around the beautiful old place, and exhibit its numerous historic lions to you; but I am unselfish enough to want you to enjoy it, even though I cannot share the pleasure with you. I know of no other spot which can boast so many of the advantages and so few of the drawbacks of a summer home. Miss Edmonds would be simply charmed with the country about there; and the views which she could sketch would be unlike any which she has in her portfolios at present.”

Over this last, Marjorie laughed, and blushed a little; she had not known that he was so familiar with her sketches from nature. She had come to have a poor opinion of her work in that direction, since she had seen with what a free strong hand he reproduced on paper the choice places he visited.

It was perhaps because she was indifferent as to where they went, and also because Mr. Maxwell

could assist so materially in arranging the details for this one place, that it was finally chosen.

“We will go there for a time at least,” decided Mrs. Edmonds, “and if we find that Mr. Maxwell has looked upon this favorite spot through prejudiced spectacles, why, we can change our plans and go elsewhere. We will leave ourselves untrammelled by any ideas of stability, and, for this one summer, will feel as free to rove as the gypsies themselves.”

She laughed a little as she spoke, and cast a swift questioning glance at Mr. Maxwell. How much or how little did that gentleman understand of her reasons for action? She could not but be grateful for the gracious and skillful way in which he aided and abetted all her plans. Was he thoughtful for her, just as he was for all man and womankind, or was he—— But here the mother resolutely stopped her questionings.

It was while Ralph Bramlett, who was being kept very busy, was wondering what would happen next, and trying to decide just how he should conduct himself, if he should meet Marjorie, as he was liable to, of course, on any day, that Estelle waylaid him one evening as he was passing the door in haste, with her budget of news.

“Ralph, did you know that Mrs. Edmonds and Marjorie were going away for the summer? They are going to close their house. Nearly everything is in readiness. It seems that Mr. Maxwell has changed his plans, and is going to start earlier

than he had intended, and what do you think! Marjorie and her mother are going with him! That is, they are going to his old home to spend the summer. I wonder they do not go abroad with him! Marjorie cannot apparently endure the thought of being entirely separated from him, so she is going to his old haunts to rove around alone among them, I suppose, while he is away in Europe enjoying himself. Isn't that infatuation, Ralph? Isn't it queer in Marjorie? It seems so unlike her, some way. I never thought she had much of the sentimental in her disposition, when you and she were so intimate. Did you?"

"It is of very little consequence what I thought," said Ralph, "and I am sure it is of equally little consequence where other people spend their summers—or their lives, for that matter. I am unable to account for your exceeding interest in the movements of the Edmonds family. Suppose we dismiss them from our topics for conversation in the future?"

"Oh, well," said Estelle, "I won't talk about them if you are so particular; Marjorie and I have always been friends; and I thought you would like to hear the news; especially as you and she used to be so fond of each other."

"That, my dear, is another point which I am weary of hearing harped upon. Can't you let past things alone?"

She pouted a little and told him he was cross; and she believed he always was, when she said

anything about Marjorie; and she didn't understand it. Then he said he was in haste, and could not discuss even such important questions with her at present; and he laughed a little, and tried to pass it all off as a joke; adding that he would try to call later in the evening, or, if business detained him, certainly to-morrow evening, when they would have affairs of vastly more importance to consider.

CHAPTER XXX.

"TALKING IT OVER."

ON the following Tuesday morning Ralph Bramlett looked out of the window of his office in the distillery, and watched the train whizz by which he knew was bearing Marjorie Edmonds away, with Mr. Maxwell for her escort. Oh, the mother was there, of course; but he ignored her. He had told himself for weeks that he hated her; she seemed to him a part of that relentless fate which had pursued him.

He told himself now that Marjorie was gone, at last, out of his life; and this time he meant it. There was a dull pain in his heart which made him understand that that subtle undertone of hope which had been all along telling him that somehow, out of all this obstinacy, and misunderstanding, and miscalculation, would evolve that which he desired, had proved treacherous and left him. That rose-colored future which had held itself before him for so many years had disappeared, and only dull prose filled its place.

He was Bramlett, bookkeeper in a distillery, and under engagement of marriage with Estelle Douglass.

“Well,” he said, throwing down his fountain-pen with an angry frown, as, having been held point downward while he considered, it proceeded to conduct itself after the manner of those interesting instruments, and let fall a great black tear on his account-book.

“Let her go; let everything go! Fate has done all the evil that she can for me; now I’ll see what I can do. I’ll be a rich man, anyway. I’ll show her one of these days what she has lost by nursing her obstinacy and ill humor until she has ruined everything.” His pronouns were confused, but he very well understood that the second one meant Marjorie Edmonds, and not fate.

“I may not be a judge,” he continued, in communion with his worst self, “and I may not be able to have anything else that I had planned, but I will see to it that I am not circumvented here. If I am not a millionaire before I am twenty-five years older, then the world may set me down for a fool. I see my way to so much, at least; and it is not a very small thing, after all, as this world goes. the time was when we used to talk sentimentalism together, and assure ourselves that we did not care for money; it was honor we meant to seek. Fool! As if she did not like money better than the most of them! What else attracted her to that whining hypocrite? Estelle is more honest, at least; she frankly owns that she is fond of it. Well, she shall have it. She and I will do very well together. She will know how to spend my money

in a way to do me honor. If I only knew some way to convince that girl that she had not broken my heart. After all, it is that which hurts most, I believe; the thought of those two talking it over, and laughing together about the spectacle which I made of myself that night! What evil spirit possessed me? I might have known it would come to worse than nothing. If I had only kept away from the Schuyler farm altogether, nothing of the sort would have happened. I believe the place is bewitched; there has been nothing for me but ill luck in every direction since I went there before; and I shouldn't have gone this time if Estelle had not almost forced me to do so. That girl must learn to mind her own business better than she knows how to do, now. Once married, I think it will not be difficult to show her that I intend to be master in my own house.

“I'll be even with that Maxwell yet, in some way. He has ruined my life, but he shall not gloat over it always. Talk about justice! There is no such thing in the world. The paths of some people are spread with roses; no matter what they do, how dishonorable they are, or false, everywhere they turn is sunshine. Look at Marjorie Edmonds. Where could one find a specimen more false than she has been? And she deceived me utterly! I thought she would endure anything from me. Probably she intended to deceive me all the time. I have no doubt but that they planned it together. And their lives must be

crowned. Everything just as they wish and plan. While for others, a relentless fate as cruel as death, dogs their track, overthrowing their most cherished hopes, and bringing their best efforts to nought. What have I done but the best I could, all my life? And what have I had but reproach, and misfortune, and misery in return? Especially since I took what people call the right road, and joined the church. I wish I had not done that, at least. If it had not been for Glyde Douglass I should never have thought of such a thing. I believe that entire Douglass family have been selected to be my evil geniuses. Oh, well—that is only a sham with the rest. Money is the only real success; from this time forth I am going in for *success*." Yet the sentence ended with a groan almost of despair, and the poor self-haunted, self-destroyed young man suddenly bowed his head on the great ledger spread open before him, and his strong young frame shook with the pain that filled his soul. Even when he talked with himself, he was not quite true. That is, there was really another and better self which it was becoming the habit of his life to ignore.

It was weeks before Marjorie Edmonds mentioned his name. Then, one afternoon, she began suddenly to talk about him; telling that early and only confidant of hers, the patient mother, some things which she had decided that she ought to know.

It was a lovely summer day, and they were sitting together under one of the grand old trees which Mr. Maxwell had described to them ; Marjorie had just sketched it, and her mother was criticising it, when the daughter began :

"Mother, you have been as good as gold to me, as usual. I don't suppose I can ever tell you how grateful I have been for all your patience with me,—but I feel it all the same. There is a favor I want to ask of you, but before that, I ought to tell you something. That night, you know, when we went to the party at Schuylers'—Ralph came out to me on the lawn and said some words which I will not repeat, not even to you, because I want to think that he did not mean a great many of them ; he was wild with excitement. However, he said enough to make me understand something of what you have felt about him, and have tried to have me see. I think you are right, in part, mother ; he could never have had the character which I thought he had. He—but never mind now,—all that is past ; you will understand, mother dear, why I do not speak any plainer. Of course you are sure now that everything is as utterly past between us two as though one of us had died. But that does not hinder me from wanting to help him. From words which he spoke to me that night, I feel sure that there is misery in store for him and for Estelle ; not because of me, but because he—Mother, he does not have right views of—of anything ! I do not understand it. I have thought

over what he said, and wondered how it was possible for a Christian, even in the excitement of anger, to speak such words. I tremble for them, mother, and my heart aches with the longing to keep them from wrecking their lives."

Said Mrs. Edmonds, speaking slowly, choosing her words with utmost care, so that her daughter might feel that they were spoken from conviction and not from prejudice. "Do you feel sure, Marjorie, that he knows what it is to be a Christian? Has he impressed you at any time as a man who was acquainted, and in daily fellowship with Jesus Christ? I am afraid, dear, and have been from the first, that uniting with the church was one of the accidents or impulses of his life, rather than a deliberate public avowal of an inward change. I do not necessarily mean by that, that he intended to deceive, but rather that he was himself deceived. I am afraid he thinks that religion consists in joining the church, and attending the communion when it is convenient, and a few outward acts of that sort."

She did not know whether or not Marjorie would be shocked by such plain speaking, but the girl made no sign that she had even heard. She sat with one hand shading her eyes, and the sunlight glinting through the trees shimmered around her, making a beautiful picture for the mother's eyes to rest upon; but there was a pain in it for her. Was this sweet young life to be always shadowed by that baleful one which she who had been called of God to shield and train her child,—had per-

mitted to be so closely connected with it? After a few minutes of silence, she asked gently: “ What was the favor, daughter, that was to be asked of me? ”

“ Mother,” said Marjorie, dropping her hand and turning toward her, “ I am afraid you are right. I am afraid that Ralph Bramlett has no personal acquaintance with Jesus Christ; has not even sought it. And he is a member of the church! I have heard it said that people who unite with the church under mistaken ideas, without having really given themselves over into Christ’s keeping are so hard to reach.” Silence again for a few minutes, then: “ Mother, I am sure you do not misunderstand me. If Ralph could be,—if it were possible for him to be honorably released from Estelle Douglass to-morrow, he could never, *never* be anything to me; all that is utterly and forever past. When one actually loses one’s respect for and faith in a person, why then— But the favor I wanted to ask is this; you used to like Ralph, mamma, and you have been good to him, and tried, in a great many ways to help him; let a little bit of that old liking, or old pity if you will, creep into your heart for him again—enough so that you can pray for him with all your soul. Mother, will you join me in a union of prayer for Ralph and Estelle, that God will not let go of either of them? That He will in some way, by some path that we do not understand, nor even see to be possible, lead them to Himself? For I am persuaded that Estelle knows no more

about this matter than he does, and they will both have ruined lives. Can you join me in this, dear mother?"

Mrs. Edmonds's manner was very tender and serious.

"Daughter," she said, "I want you to feel how entirely my heart goes out with you in this desire, and how fully I will join with you in a covenant of prayer; yet there is one thing which I feel that I must say to you. Do you remember, dear, that even *God* cannot force people to yield their wills to Him? He has chosen to limit Himself, in order to make us free to become all that grace can make us, instead of being mere machines. It is He who cried: '*Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.*' I do not know Estelle Douglass very well; but I have studied Ralph for years; what is in his way, is his own undisciplined will; and he does not call it by that name; he says '*fate.*' Do you remember how often the words used to be on his boyish lips: '*That is just my fate!*' when really what he was bemoaning had nearly always to do with some impulsive folly of his own? I did not think so much of it then, though I remember I talked with him more than once about it, but I have seen since that he is always pursued by the idea that a Something outside of himself, and with which he has nothing to do, makes his misfortunes for him, and oversets plans which were wise and ought to have prospered. He still names it '*Fate,*' I think, and not '*Self.*'"

"Now, dear, I wanted to say thus much to you, lest you might think that God could save Ralph in spite of himself, and grow to feeling, perhaps, if you were disappointed, after long waiting, that He was almost cruel. I have known people who did not understand God any better than that—but we will pray and PRAY; and never let go our hold while we live. That is our part; and we will be sure that He who so loved—that He gave His Son, will do His part."

Mr. Maxwell had been abroad for five weeks. There had come from him two letters, addressed to "Mrs. Margaret Edmonds," but inside they commenced "Dear Friends." Delightful letters they were; it was almost as good, Mrs. Edmonds said, as having a trip abroad one's self, with all the discomforts left out. The week following this talk with her daughter, the mother, who was his sole correspondent from that family, wrote this:

"My daughter wishes me to ask a favor of you. She has been studying lately with deepest interest the verse: 'Where two of you shall agree,' etc., and kindred passages, and has become impressed as never before with the power which lies in a union of prayer. She wishes me to ask you to join with her mother and herself in a covenant of prayer for the young man, Ralph Bramlett, and his betrothed wife, Estelle Douglass. We have occasion to fear that neither of these know what

it is to have the Lord Jesus Christ for a personal Saviour, and to try to follow Him in their daily lives. Marjorie, through a certain experience of hers, which loyalty to her sense of honor keeps her from fully revealing even to me, has come to believe that the young man, especially, is in danger; and that unless some strong Hand interposes, there will be the moral shipwreck of two lives. She bids me say that there are a few people, whom, it seems to her, God has taught in a peculiar sense, how to pray, and you impress her as one of these; therefore she desires to lay this burden upon your conscience. We know, without awaiting your reply, what it will be; for by the same token that we know He has taught you to pray, we are sure He has given you a heart to respond to all such calls as these."

It was a dreary, rainy evening when Mr. Maxwell read and re-read this letter. He had felt more alone that day than he was wont to feel; in fact he knew that during all the days there was a curious sense of homesickness upon him, such as, in his many trips abroad, he had never felt before. He had turned over his pile of home-letters eagerly, sought out the one which he recognized as from Mrs. Edmonds, and pushing the rest aside had given himself entirely to its influence. Evidently it in some degree met and ministered to the homesick feeling at his heart. Especially had he read several times with deepest interest the paragraph

commencing: “My daughter wishes me to ask a favor of you.” He was conscious as he read it, that there was a quickening of his pulses, and an eagerness to know anything which this daughter could desire. Was there anything that she could ask, which he would not be willing to give? Yet the petition had a strange effect upon him. He dropped the letter at last, and began to pace up and down his small room.

“The unmitigated scoundrel!” he said aloud, and with suppressed force in his tones, “and she is giving her life to prayer for him!”

Back and forth he paced, feeling the place too small for him. He stepped to the window and pushed it up to its utmost height; he wished himself out in the rain and the darkness.

“God forgive me!” he said at last, “*can* I pray for him with all my heart? Can I *forgive* him for the mischief he has wrought?”

He sat down presently, and leaning his elbows on his little writing-table, covered his face with both hands. There was need for heart-searching: Was there really that in his heart which prevented him from crying to God for a soul in peril? He got down on his knees at last, and prayed like one who had indeed been taught how; even by the Holy Spirit. But at that time his prayer was chiefly for himself.

There went out by the next morning’s American mail, addressed to “Mrs. Margaret Edmonds,” a very brief letter, which ran as follows:

“MY VERY DEAR FRIEND:—There is no time to write a letter by this mail, I only take a moment to say in reply to your and your daughter’s request. Amen; with all my soul. God bless you and her.

“LEONARD MAXWELL.”

So this is the way in which they “talked over together” Ralph Bramlett’s affairs!

THE END.

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